BS"D
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Potomac Torah Study Center
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NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah. NOTE: since the Beth Sholom office is closed for the next week, I cannot guarantee that there will be copies at the shul this week. With outdoor davening, look on the tables between the men's and women's sections.

Sefer Bereishis closes with the death of Yosef, the first of the brothers to die. Sefer Shemot opens when Levi (the last living brother) dies, in the year 2332. The focus of Bereishis is individuals and families, especially Avraham, Yitzhak, Yaakov, and Yaakov's children. The Torah in Shemot, however, takes a macro view of B'Nai Yisrael, the nation that arose after Yaakov's family went to Egypt in the year 2238. In about 200 years before the Exodus in 2448, the Jewish population went from a few hundred individuals to a few million. Seventy men and their families, at most a few hundred people, accompanied Yaakov and joined Yosef's small family. (The only woman listed is Dina.) By the time of the Exodus, B'Nai Yisrael consisted of 600,000 adult men, their wives, and their children – certainly at least a few million people. Even counting a generation as approximately 25 years, an increase in the population of this magnitude in only around eight generations has to be a miracle.

In Sefer Bereishis, the Torah usually identifies individuals by name. In Parashat Shemot, the Torah does not identify any Jew of the generation of the Exodus, other than Moshe, until naming his brother Aharon at 4:14. Specifically, the Torah does not mention the names of Moshe's other family members when he is born, or the individual Jews who encounter Moshe when he leaves the palace. The focus of the Torah is on B'Nai Yisrael as a nation, not specific individuals. (We gradually meet individual Jews by name later in the Sefer.)

In chapter 3, God addresses Moshe, seemingly without warning. Why did Hashem choose Moshe to be his agent to bring B'Nai Yisrael to freedom? Consider what the Torah has already mentioned about Moshe. Although raised in Paro's palace, as a grandson of Paro, he considered the Jews, not the Egyptians, as his brethren (2:11). He would unilaterally protect the underdog when he would see one person attacking or fighting another, especially when powerful people would attack the weak (2:11-13, 16-17). He chases away local shepherds who drive Yitro's daughters away from the well and then waters their sheep. Moshe, in short, embodies chesed and empathy – in that respect, he takes after Avraham. Hashem chose Avraham in large part because of his chesed – what He sees in Moshe as well. Rabbi David Fohrman's scholars ask where Moshe learned chesed growing up in the evil culture of Paro's Egypt. One answer – Batya, Paro's daughter, who exhibited chesed when she saved a baby boy in a teva in the Nile River, even when she knew that her father decreed death to all male Jewish children.

Empathy and chesed are necessary values for a leader able to take B'Nai Yisrael out of slavery and teach them God's mitzvot. We read the Aseret Dibrot, Ten Statements, in Yitro. The one place in Sefer Shemot with a large number of mitzvot is Mishpatim, which comes immediately following Yitro, and which presents specific mitzvot to translate the Aseret Dibrot into concrete laws. Most of the mitzvot in Mishpatim involve chesed – caring for the disadvantaged, such as widows, orphans, and foreigners in our community. The importance of chesed is a theme throughout the Torah and Navi – it is central to following the Torah.

Moshe also has unusual insight. When an Egyptian taskmaster whips a Jewish slave, no one else sees the incident – because this behavior is normal for the time. Moshe, however, sees that it is evil and reacts. When a bush is on fire in

the desert, nothing unusual in a desert, it takes an unusual person to notice that the fire is a miracle, because the fire keeps going without burning up the bush. (How long would a person need to watch to realize that the fire is not burning up anything and that therefore the fire is a miracle?) God wants someone who can see when something that might appear to be normal really is a miracle.
How many times have we read the story of Moshe and the Exodus and failed to recognize what is in the Torah in plain sight, as long as we look carefully? There are ample reasons to understand why God selects Moshe to bring His people out of slavery. The Torah gives plenty of evidence to demonstrate how Moshe embodies the values of Avraham and the Torah, and how he recognizes what others cannot see. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, whose yahrtzeit comes in little more than a week (Rosh Hodesh Shevat), was also a master of insight who helped generations of his friends and congregants to appreciate more of our heritage. Moshe was part of Avraham's legacy, and we are part of the legacy that comes to us from Avraham, Moshe, Yehoshua, and a long line of prophets and Rabbis since then (Pirkei Avot 1:1).

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Yehoshua Mayer HaLevi ben Nechama Zelda, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, Ramesh bat Heshmat, and Regina bat Simcha, who need our prayers. I have removed a number of names that have been on the list for a long time. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom; Hanukkah Samaich,

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Shemot: Burning Interests

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

In Jewish history, there is a hardly an object more expounded upon than the burning bush. Its symbolism is analyzed, its significance expounded upon, and its impact is noted for generations. This week, rather than discuss the actual burning bush and its meaning, I'd like to view the event from a totally different approach — Moshe's.

The Torah tells us in Exodus 3:1- 4 that Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro, his father-in-law, when, "an angel of G-d appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amidst the bush. Moshe saw the event and behold, the bush was burning in fire and yet the bush was not consumed. Moshe said, 'I will turn from my course and see the marvelous sight — why does the bush not burn?' Hashem saw that Moshe turned from his path to see the sight and He called out to him from amidst the bush and said, 'Moshe Moshe… '" The conversation ultimately leads to our exodus from Egypt.

However, the entire narrative, from the moment that Moshe notices the burning bush until Hashem speaks to him from its midst, seems overstated. After Moshe sees the amazing sight, why does the Torah mention that Moshe says "I will go look at the amazing sight?" Further, why does the Torah preface Hashem's charge to Moshe with the words, " Hashem saw that Moshe turned from his path to see the sight, and He called out to him from amidst the bush?" It seems that only

after Hashem openly acknowledges Moshe's interest in the spectacle does he call out, "Moshe, Moshe," thus beginning the process of redemption.

The Torah, which never uses needless words, could have simply stated, " Moshe saw that the bush was burning and yet the bush was not consumed. Moshe turned to marvelous sight, and Hashem called out to him from amidst the bush and said, 'Moshe Moshe… '"

The Midrash Tanchuma expounds upon the verse, "Moshe turned from his path to see the sight." There is an argument whether he took three steps or just craned his neck. The Midrash continues. Hashem said, "you pained yourself to look, I swear you are worthy that I reveal myself to you."

The Medrash was definitely bothered by the extra wording regarding Moshe's decision to look and Hashem's open commendation of that decision. But it is still very difficult to understand. Moshe sees a spectacle of miraculous proportions and looks. Why is that such a meritorious act? Doesn't everyone run to a fire? Aren't there hoards that gather to witness amazing events?

In the early 1920's, Silas Hardoon, a Sephardic Jewish millionaire, made his fortune living in China. Childless, he began to give his money away to Chinese charities. One night his father appeared in a dream and implored him to do something for his own people. Silas shrugged it off. After all, there were hardly any of his people in China. But the dreams persisted, and Silas decided to act. The next day he spoke to Chacham Ibraham, a Sephardic Rabbi who led the tiny Chinese Jewish community. The Chacham's advice sounded stranger than the dreams. He told Silas to build a beautiful synagogue in the center of Shanghai. It should contain more than 400 seats, a kitchen, and a dining room. Mr. Hardoon followed the charge to the letter. He named the shul "Bais Aharon" in memory of his father. A few years later Mr. Hardoon died leaving barely a minyan to enjoy a magnificent edifice, leaving a community to question the necessity of the tremendous undertaking.

In 1940, Japanese counsel to Lithuania Sempo Sugihara issued thousands of visas for Kovno Jews to take refuge in Curaçao via Japan. Included in that group was the Mirrer Yeshiva. They arrived in Kobe but were transported to Shanghai where they remained for the entire war. The Mirrer Yeshiva had a perfect home with a kitchen, study hall and dining room — Bais Aharon! The building had exactly enough seats to house all the students for five solid years of Torah study during the ravages of World War II. The dream of decades earlier combined with action, became a thriving reality.

Moshe our Teacher knew from the moment he spotted that bush that something very extraordinary was occurring. He had two choices: approach the spectacle or walk on. If he nears the bush he knew he would face an experience that would alter his life forever. Hashem knew that Moshe had this very difficult conflict. His approach would require commitment and self sacrifice. He took three steps that changed the course of history. Hashem understood the very difficult decision Moshe had made and declared that such fortitude is worthy of the redeemer of my children.

In many aspects of our lives we encounter situations that may commit us to change. It may be a new charity we decide to let through our doors, or a new patient we decide to see, or even a new worthy cause we decide to entertain. They all require us to take three steps and look. If we walk away, we may not just be ignoring a burning issue. We may be ignoring another burning bush.

Good Shabbos

Anti-Semitism and Othering

By Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2021

The book of Shemot opens with the first phenomenon of anti-Semitism that we find in the Torah. It is not hatred directed at an individual, but to an entire people.

It begins with Pharoah. He says to his fellow Egyptians that the Hebrews are a people to be feared: "Behold, the people are more numerous than us. They will join our enemies and will leave the land."(Exodus 1:9-10). The concern is not only that they will leave. The subtext – as explained by the Rabbis – is that by joining with their enemies, they will drive us

ourselves from our land. They are a threat to our national security – the classic “fifth column” canard that has been ascribed to the Jews throughout the centuries. They are different from us, their ultimate allegiance is not to this country, and they will undermine us from within.

Pharoah’s slander is an act of othering. This othering builds on a pre-existing visceral response to these people shaped by Egyptian culture. In Egypt, shepherds were seen as abominable (Genesis 46:34) and certain eating practices – those of the Israelites – as repugnant (43:32). Today, we would strive to overcome that visceral reaction, and to cultivate an appreciation of difference. Such was not the reality then, obviously. And yet, even when such a reaction was very much in place, it did not have to translate into fear, hatred and demonization.

It didn’t have to but it did.

The visceral disgust of this people’s habits and professions mutated into a disgust of the people themselves. As in Nazi Germany, a process of dehumanizing took place: they are like animals; they are not fully human like you and I. The Torah describes how they multiplied: “And the Children of Israel paru va-yishretzu, increased and teemed,” (Exodus 1:7). The word for ‘teemed’ here is “yishretzu” the root of which is sheretz, a creeping thing. They multiplied like bugs, like cockroaches. They spread everywhere, always underfoot, invading our homes, coming out of the woodwork: “and the land was filled with them.” (Exodus 1:7). Their very presence evoked disgust. The Egyptians “were repulsed by the sight of them.” (Exodus 1:12).

This dehumanizing gives permission, first to enslave them, and then, as it did for the Nazis, to begin to wipe them out. Pharoah makes an edict to murder all the baby boys, and no one protests. Why should they? That’s what you do with cockroaches – you kill them and stop them from multiplying.

It was this perception that also saved them – at least for a brief period. When the midwives are challenged why they did not carry out Pharaoh’s edict, they explain: “The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian ones, ki chayot heina, for they are like animals.”(Exodus 1:19) They don’t need midwives – they give birth in the fields, just like animals do. This excuse was accepted without challenge. If they are truly animals, then this makes total sense. The dehumanization made every claim, and certainly every slander – no matter how irrational – believable.

This process is familiar to us from our history as a people, and we know well the hatred, oppression, acts of murder, and even attempts at genocide that have resulted from it. We must be extra-vigilant against signs that it may be happening again – something for us all to take to heart when we see the anti-Semitism that is growing in our society.

A question we also have to ask ourselves is, are there times when we ourselves also do this to those who are not exactly like us? We know that this can happen when it comes to matters of race and ethnicity, and even, at times, can shape how we, as Jews, perceive non-Jews. But such othering can also be part of our perception of our fellow Jews whose group identity is different from our own. This happens at times – thankfully, much less than before – between the denominations, and it happens – all too often – in our perception of the Hareidi community. They, like the Israelites in Goshen, live apart from the rest of society; they have different practices and different ways of dressing. How much does this seeing them not only as different, but as truly “other,” lead to a loss of shared fellowship and seeing all of us as one people? Are we “repulsed by the sight of them”? Even when there are strong disagreements in matters of ideology, values, and way of life, we must never allow this to descend to the acts of othering and all its pernicious effects.

Much of this starts with direct human interaction. It is so much harder to sustain one’s biases and stereotypes in the face of a real person. Direct encounter can often breed an appreciation for the fundamental humanity of one another, to a connection on a deep human level.

Being on the receiving end of anti-Semitism and othering for so long must propel us both to do all that we can to never let such things happen to us again and to never be party to such acts ourselves. This is our charge. Now let us act upon it.

Shabbat Shalom.

https://library.yctorah.org/2021/12/anti-semitism-and-othering/

Everyone Counts

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine * © 2021

Moshe is our hero. Abducted from the Jewish community as a baby, he was adopted by Bisya, the daughter of Paroh. Fortuitously Moshe's mother was chosen as his nursemaid, and the bond with her family remained strong, even as Moshe grew up as an adopted prince in the house of Paroh. With time Moshe was told that he was Jewish; he was part of the noble tribe of Levi. As he approached the age, of what we call today, Bar Mitzvah, his father shared the great legacy, hopes, and destiny, of this oppressed and enslaved people known as the Jews.

The Torah tells us, "Moshe grew big; he went out to his brethren to commiserate with them in their suffering." The commentaries explain that the statement "Moshe grew big," is not intended just as a chronological statement, it is actually a statement of Moshe's becoming great. "Moshe grew big," by going out to his brethren and caring about their plight. Even though he was a prince, he cared, commiserated, and tried to help. In doing so, he showed signs of maturity and budding leadership.

What is particularly interesting is what happened on that first day that Moshe went out to the field. The Torah relates that he saw a Mitzri taskmaster whipping a Jew intensely. Moshe saw the abuse and acted. He killed the wicked taskmaster and somewhat alleviated the suffering. As a result of Moshe's drastic act, he was forced to flee to evade Paroh's wrath. Eventually Moshe would return to be the messenger to redeem the Jewish people.

The incident of saving the abused man is particularly remarkable when we consider who this man was. Rashi tells us that he was the husband of Shilomis bas Divri. Shilomis was the only woman throughout the Mitzrayim exile who was assaulted. The commentaries explain that she was overly friendly with the Mitzrim and did not maintain a healthy distance. The tragic assault was a singular, tragic event, undoubtedly associated with great stigma. The husband of this woman was not considered among the elite of the people. Yet, when Moshe saw he was being abused, Moshe stood up and came to his aid.

The incident caused Moshe problems, not only from Paroh, but even from the Jews themselves. Dasan and Aviram-- the rabble rousers that were eventually punished in the Korach rebellion-- called Moshe out on his remarkable intervention. In fact, they are the ones who informed on Moshe to Paroh. Additionally, one can imagine that even among the elite of the Jews there well might have been murmuring about Moshe's action. "Why would Moshe put himself out, and endanger more people, by killing the taskmaster," people may have wondered. "It is not like this abused man was well connected, or anything." He was actually a downtrodden individual, shamed by the incident with his wife, and hardly the person to champion a movement for.

Yet, to Moshe he was a person in need of assistance; and to his assistance Moshe came. "Moshe grew big," by caring, by standing up, by taking a position, even for the ordinary Jew.

Years later Moshe would be the conduit for Torah, and would declare the Mitzva to love the newcomer, and not to take advantage of the widow, orphan, or any other downtrodden person. Moshe would be the one to instruct the judges of the newly formed judicial system, "Big and small, you shall treat equally."

Sometimes we might slip. If a person is not charismatic, wealthy, or well connected, we might not see their needs as quite as important as someone else's. The Torah introduces Moshe -- his story and his career — very carefully, to instruct us as to what made Moshe into Moshe. On opening day of his becoming great he is not seen rubbing shoulders with just the right people. Moshe is seen caring. Period.

A number of years ago, a friend of mine was dealing with a serious health issue with one of his children, and it was not being diagnosed. Doctor after doctor examined the child, acknowledged a problem, ordered tests, but could not identify the problem in order to direct treatment. A suggestion was made that he should place a call to a prominent Rebitzen who was well connected in the medical field and might be able to offer some advice and direction.

My friend was quite nervous about calling. He told me, "To unravel our story, just to explain what is going on, is going to take at least a half an hour of her time. How will I do that? Why would she speak to me?" he wondered aloud.

He decided to make the call. When the Rebitzen picked up he began by name dropping all kinds of distant connections that he had with her. His grandfather had grown up in the same neighborhood as her father, and his uncle had gone to the same Yeshiva as her husband. Suddenly, with the sweetest, most kind voice, the Rebitzen stopped him and said, “I really appreciate the pleasantries. But I can hear in your voice that something is the matter. Perhaps we can discuss what is concerning you first, and then we can go back to our family connections.”

Moshe did not just go out to his brethren when he became big; Moshe became big because he went out to his brethren. And not to just anyone. Moshe became great when he reached out to protect even the person who was not well connected, because in doing so he showed that everyone counts.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

Rabbi Rhine, until recently Rav of Southeast Congregation in Silver Spring, is a well known mediator and coach. His web site, Teach613.org, contains many of his brilliant Devrei Torah. RMRhine@Teach613.org. **Teach613 recently started a new Shulchan Aruch Zoom class this week. For information or to join, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

What is Your Name? Thoughts on Parashat Shemot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

When I was a student at Yeshiva College many years ago, I saw a passage scribbled onto a subway wall at the IRT 181st Street station. That passage had a big impact on me then, and continues to be important to me so many years later. The passage was a quotation from Alan Watts: "For when man no longer confuses himself with the definition of himself that others have given him, he is at once universal and unique."

It is so easy to confuse ourselves with definitions of ourselves given to us by others. People may stereotype us, may impose their standards on us, may treat us as "things" rather than as autonomous human beings. They may judge us based on our religion or race, on our political views; they may see us as "the other" without ever bothering to see who we really are. When we are constantly being dehumanized or stereotyped by others, it is all too possible for us to internalize the external definitions of ourselves imposed on us by friends and foes alike.

The Torah portion relates that Pharaoh feared the growing numbers of Israelites in Egypt, and he decided to enslave them and to have their male children murdered. Rabbi Hayyim Angel has pointed out that the Torah conspicuously avoids mentioning the names of any Israelites or Egyptians – except for Shifra and Puah – from the time Joseph died until the birth of Moses. (Pharaoh is a title, not a personal name.) People – both Egyptians and Israelites – had become nameless "things" – oppressors and oppressed, masters and slaves. When humans are reduced to "things," then both the oppressor and oppressed are dehumanized; they internalize false ideas about who they are and about their true worth as human beings.

To be universal and unique – to be who we really are – we need to develop a strong inner life that enables us to resist becoming victims of dehumanization. Dr. Bruno Bettelheim, who had been a Jewish prisoner in a German concentration camp, wrote that the prisoners feared not only for their physical lives; they feared that they would come to see themselves as the Nazis saw them – as animals. "The main problem is to remain alive and unchanged...the more absolute the tyranny, the more debilitated the subject." A Midrash (Tanhuma, Vayakhel) teaches that each person has three names: the name given by parents, the name given by fellow human beings, and the name which one acquires for him/herself.

The name given by parents represents their hopes for the child. The name may link the child to an ancestor; or may be something untraditional. This name reflects the parent's values and traditions. Each of us is shaped by the name our parents gave us. This is good and valuable for us, but should not be allowed to undermine our own individual freedom and choices. Parents should give us roots; but also wings. The name given to us by fellow human beings represents our reputation in our community and world. The name might tend to idealize us or to demonize us; it might be true to who we are, or it might be a total misreading of who we are by people who do not know us or understand us.

If we live our lives by the definitions given to us by others, we live a life of shadows and illusions. These first two names are given to us by others. The third name, though, is what we acquire for ourselves. This name draws on what we have

learned from parents and fellow human beings; but its ultimate source is our own individual minds and souls. Inside of each of us is our own "name," our own real being. This is who we really are when we rise above externally imposed definitions of ourselves. Throughout our lifetimes, we learn – we grow – we strive. We are each a work of art in progress.

We derive strength and inspiration from many sources. We are accosted and dehumanized by unpleasant and hateful people. If we are to develop the full potential of our lives, we need to focus on the name we acquire for ourselves--our true selves. We need to foster the inner strength and wisdom to be universal and unique. We need to answer the question: what is your name?.
* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/what-your-name-thoughts-parashat-shemot

** The Angel for Shabbat column is a service of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, fostering an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism. Please join our growing family of members by joining online at www.jewishideas.org

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The Unsung Heroes of the Exodus

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Our Sages codified most of the holiday Haftarot (the prophetic passages read after Torah reading in synagogue), but left it to individual communities to decide which prophetic readings to select for regular Shabbatot. Communities often chose similar passages, but they occasionally focused on different themes in the Torah reading that required different readings.

Parashat Shemot is one such example. Ashkenazim read from Isaiah chapters 27-28, a prophecy of redemption. They highlight how the people of Israel become enslaved and now required divine redemption. In contrast, Sephardic communities selected Jeremiah chapter 1. This passage features God's choosing Jeremiah, the prophet's reluctance, and God's compelling him to go on his mission. This Haftarah parallels Moses's selection, as he also expressed unwillingness until God forced him to accept his mission.

While worthy and central themes in their own right, they do not account for another vital element in Parashat Shemot, namely, a series of brief narratives pertaining to five heroic women: Shiphrah, Puah, Yocheved, Moses's sister (likely Miriam), and Pharaoh's daughter.

Shiphrah and Puah

The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shiphrah and the other Puah, saying, "When you deliver the Hebrew women, look at the birthstool: if it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live." The midwives, fearing God, did not do as the king of Egypt had told them; they let the boys live. So the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, letting the boys live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth." And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. And because the midwives feared God, He established households for them. (Exodus 1:15-21)

The Hebrew meyalledot ha-Ivriyyot, Hebrew midwives, could mean that they themselves were Israelites (Sotah 11b; Rashi, Rashbam, Ibn Ezra, Ramban), or that they were midwives who served the Israelite population (Josephus, Philo, Abarbanel, Malbim). We cannot determine their ethnicity from the text.

What we can see is that they fear God, namely, they have a powerful moral sense and defy the decrees of the wicked Pharaoh (see, for example, Genesis 20:11; 42:18; Deuteronomy 25:17-19, for illustrations of fear of God=moral).

We do not know what gave these two midwives such moral courage in an evil society that threatened to destroy them if they were caught. We do not even know if they were Israelites! Yet, they are immortalized by the Torah. Strikingly, this narrative is longer than the Torah's description of Israelite slavery! The Torah celebrates the moral heroism and defiance of a wicked society of two otherwise unknown figures.

Yocheved and Moses's Sister

A certain man of the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months. When she could hide him no longer, she got a wicker basket for him and caulked it with bitumen and pitch. She put the child into it and placed it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile. And his sister stationed herself at a distance, to learn what would befall him. (Exodus 2:1-4)

Despite Pharaoh's subsequent decree of drowning boys, Israelites still chose to have children. Ramban observes the heroism of Moses's parents to bring a child into the world in the face of Pharaoh's decree. Midrashic traditions also praise Miriam's inspiring Moses's parents to bear more children (e.g., Sotah 12a).

Pharaoh's Daughter

The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her slave girl to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, "This must be a Hebrew child." Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and get you a Hebrew nurse to suckle the child for you?" And Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will pay your wages." So the woman took the child and nursed it. When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son. She named him Moses, explaining, "I drew him out of the water." (Exodus 2:5-10)

Pharaoh's daughter recognized that Moses was an Israelite, perhaps because he was abandoned (Shadal, Hakham), or circumcised (Exodus Rabbah 1:24; Rashbam). This is the only place in Tanakh where a baby is said to be crying (since compassion is relevant to the plot). The Torah highlights Pharaoh's daughter's compassion with a crying baby, even though she knew of her father's decree to drown Israelite baby boys!

The Torah jumps from Moses's infancy to his emerging from the palace as a grown man, filled with a deep moral sense of protest against Pharaoh and his wicked nation. Even though slavery was the law of the land, Moses was scandalized at the state-sponsored abuses.

Shiphrah-Puah, Yocheved-Moses' sister, and Pharaoh's daughter form the background of how Moses emerged as a paragon of morality. Moses came from them.

People often quietly impact on others. The Torah's emphasis on these brave individuals teaches that this sort of quiet impact can transform individuals and change the world.

* Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/unsung-heroes-exodus

Parshas Shemos – Not As Small As It Seems

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Parshas Shemos begins a new era. Recounting the sons of Yaakov who came down to Egypt, the Torah relates how the story of Egyptian slavery begins only after this entire generation had passed. It was then that a new regime began. A new Pharaoh comes to power who "does not know Yosef". (Shemos 1:8)

There is a discussion in the Medrash if this Pharaoh was indeed a new Pharaoh or simply the old Pharaoh with a "new" heart and new decrees who simply acted as though he did not know Yosef. (The Torah usually mentions the death of the prior monarch when relating the rise of a new monarch, but there is no mention here of the prior Pharaoh's death.) The Medrash concludes with Rabi Avin explaining that the Torah is teaching us a lesson in human psychology by describing Pharaoh blanketly as not knowing Yosef. The Torah is borrowing a term that Pharaoh himself used many years later saying, "I do not know G-d". (Shemos 5:2) It was Pharaoh's actions in conducting himself as though he did not know Yosef which set him on a course to ultimately deny G-d Himself.

Rabi Avin explains this connection with a parable. A man was caught stoning a beloved friend of the king. The king says the man must be executed because tomorrow he will be stoning the king! So too Pharaoh. Today he denied Yosef, G-d's beloved servant. This is why Pharaoh later said to Moshe, "I do not know G-d." (Medrash Rabbah 1:8. See Eitz Yosef ibid.)

I find this message to be powerful and far-reaching. Pharaoh was a polytheist who believed that he himself was a god. He ruled over the most powerful country of his day, and certainly had many responsibilities and concerns which entered his every decision and decree. Responsibilities both religiously and politically. While Pharaoh may have been aware of Yosef's G-d, a universal G-d above all other powers and forces, it certainly was not a concept which he gave much time or thought to. Presumably, he did not recognize Yosef's G-d any more than he recognized any other deity of any other nation. When he decided to enslave the Jews, one must assume that the least of Pharaoh's concerns was the fact that Yosef's G-d loved Yosef.

Yet, it seems that this tangential issue registered somewhere in Pharaoh's psyche. On some layer of consciousness, Pharaoh was aware that by enslaving Yosef's extended family, he was not only acting against Yosef but also against the G-d of Yosef. Apparently, on some level Pharaoh noted what must have been a relatively insignificant issue in his mind and decided that he didn't care. The Torah is teaching us here that this seemingly insignificant momentary decision to overlook Yosef's G-d had a real impact on Pharaoh's psyche. If not for this decision, when Moshe first confronted Pharaoh as a prophet of the G-d of the Jews, Pharaoh would have recognized G-d's existence immediately. It is only because he chose to ignore G-d's concern for Yosef, that he was ultimately able to deny G-d Himself.

There are many varied issues we deal with in our current, complex world. These issues, be they matters of medicine, of religion, of politics or ethics and morals, are all extremely significant, and we rightfully feel strongly about the importance of these issues. Every one of these issues touches on an endless variety of important nuances and sensitivities in our own personality and in our dealings with other people. If we let ourselves get caught up in the emotions, so often we trample on these sensitivities. When we do so, we set ourselves on a course to become someone we never wanted to be.

We must tread carefully when discussing or acting upon issues with far-reaching implications. No matter how important the issue, the side issues cannot be forgotten. If we trample upon those sensitivities, we risk losing integral parts of who we are. Those seemingly small decisions have a real impact on our psyche.

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Exploring the Matrix and Chinese Food

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

Spirit gets through by images,
Engendering variations of feeling.
Things are sought by outer appearance,
But mind's response is to basic principle.
Craftsmanship is given to the rules of sound,
Coming to life in comparisons and affective images:

-- Liu Xie (465-522 A.D.) Chinese court scholar of the Southern Dynasty

I had to come to Birmingham to know how important Chinese food was to Jews on Christmas. I had heard the legend of this custom bandied about as a joke on the streets of New York, but I don't remember it being celebrated as much as it is here.

But now I'm here and I will embrace and cherish this custom. And as per my job, I will consider the halachic questions. For instance:

- Must we eat Chinese food both on Christmas Eve and Day or will one suffice?
- What constitutes "Chinese food" anyway? Is it any dish with a bowl of rice under it? Must I be able to find it on the local Chinese restaurant's menu?
- Is food from Taiwan considered food from China?

These questions fascinate me as relevant not just to this weekend but to anyone who wants to consider what a specific cuisine is or for questions of international intrigue.

I'm sure Christmas is a lovely holiday for those that celebrate it, but the questions a rabbi would have to examine on that holiday, like how high the tree must be, or what cookies Santa deems acceptable, seem way more trivial than these questions about Chinese food.

However, I'm sure we've heard other reactions to this Chinese food ritual like:

- "This is a baseless custom that borders on silliness."
- “How can we consider it Jewish if it's not in the Torah or Talmud?"
- "I will only eat hot dogs on December 25th just to show that this custom doesn't make sense and is not part of my Jewish self." (Be careful though. Such an attitude may establish a Jewish custom to only have hotdogs on December 25th.)

There's nothing wrong with these reactions. In fact, it's vital to know what is in the Torah and what is not. It's vital to know what is an official mitzvah or Talmudically sanctioned custom and what is not. You're not obligated at all by Judaism to eat Chinese food any more than Christians are required to adopt the literal belief that a happy-go-lucky older gentleman with a magical reindeer-pulled sleigh personally delivers presents to every home the night of December 24th.

But I would argue back that it doesn't matter. If something is a ritual that gives your Jewish life meaning and it's not hurting anybody or goes against any Torah precept, why should you not do it?

As Jews, we know how important rituals are to our life and the pivotal role they play in living out and transmitting our values. As Liu Xie pointed out, all people seek out images and use them to engender variations of feeling. Without these affective images and actions, our Jewish life would ebb away. Ebb away in a stream of pure thought.

Modern psychological science bears out and even bolsters this point. Celebrated research psychologist Jonathan Haidt writes in his book *The Happiness Hypothesis* that we do not learn our values or access purpose in our life through pure reason, We learn them via a social moral matrix filled with family and community rituals.

Not just any rituals will do. The more time-tested they are, the more power they have. The more connected they are to our existing traditional matrix and bodily sensations, the more impact they have on us. Haidt writes on p. 229, "You can't just invent a good ritual through reasoning about symbolism. You need a tradition within which the symbols are embedded, and you need to invoke bodily feelings that have some appropriate associations. Then you need a community to endorse and practice it over time."

Throughout the book, Haidt (who describes himself as a Jewish atheist) extols the value of religion for serving as the binding force through which communities deliver values via this large social web of relationships and rituals.

How lucky we are that God gave us so many mitzvot for us to access values, meaning, and purpose. Rabbi Chananya ben Akashya said that God gave us so many mitzvot so we could gain merit. The merit of doing them and exploring them within our social matrix in this world. How lucky we are that these mitzvot have a lot of affective images and actions to involve our senses. How lucky we are to access purpose and meaning from our 3,000-year-old "Mitzvot Matrix."

Granted Chinese food on Christmas does not have as much history behind it as Shabbos, Matzoh, or mezuzah. While there's a consistent general structure for our Jewish matrix, every community and individual will have variations on their matrices. Chinese food may or may not be on yours.

But if it is, then do it. Do it in your home. Do it in your community. Do it so you can find another way of connecting to the matrix.

As for me, I'll be making vegetable lo mein and have Chinese five spice powder for Friday night. I think halachically that should suffice.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Moshe Rube

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Rav Kook Torah
Shemot: I Will Be Who[m] I Will Be

Moses was not happy that he had been given the task of leading the Jewish people out of Egypt. He foresaw many of the challenges involved, including the difficulty in gaining the trust of the Hebrew slaves.

> *"So I will go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers sent me to you.' They will ask what His name is — what should I tell them?"*
>
> *God replied to Moses: "'I Will Be Who[m] I Will Be.' This is what you should tell the Israelites: 'I Will Be' sent me to you."* (Ex. 3:13-14)

What do these peculiar names — "I Will Be Who[m] I Will Be" and "I Will Be" -- mean? Also, it appears that God gave Moses two different answers. Which name was Moses to use in identifying God to the people?

I Will Be With You

The Talmud in Berachot 9b explains God's response as follows:

> *"Go tell the Israelites, 'I Will Be Who[m] I Will Be.' 'I Will Be' with you in this exile, and 'I Will Be' with you in future exiles."*
>
> *Moses exclaimed, "Master of the Universe, we have enough problems already! Why mention future suffering?"*
>
> *God agreed. "Go tell them 'I Will Be' sent me to you."*

This explanation, however, creates new difficulties. Did God need Moses to explain human psychology to Him? Did Moses understand the people better than their Creator?

A Guide for All Times

God's message to the Jewish people was that the Torah and its mitzvot would enable them to attain their highest state of being. The Torah would guide them throughout history, in all situations, whether they were a subjugated people in exile or a free people in their own land.

God wanted the people to know that the redemption from slavery in Egypt was not a one-time rescue mission. They were leaving Egypt in order to receive the Torah at Sinai. The Divine name "I Will Be Who[m] I Will Be" was meant to convey a

fundamental message: the Torah is a guide for all times, a path that would sustain the people even during future exiles and troubled times.

God never intended, however, that Moses would use this name. Moses was not supposed to explicitly mention future exiles and further dishearten a downtrodden people. Rather, Moses was to tell them the shorter name, "I Will Be." The subjugated nation would be informed that God is with them now — "I Will Be" with you in this exile, and I will redeem you. And they would understand that the Torah will also guide their lives when they will live as an independent nation in their own land.

Implicitly, however, the name "I Will Be" contains a deeper message. As a free people in the Land of Israel, the Torah would prepare them to be an eternal nation, overcoming the challenges of future exiles. "'I Will Be' with them in this exile; and 'I Will Be' with them in future exiles."

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. I, pp. 45-46.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHMOT60.htm

Who Am I? (Shemot 5777)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, Former Chief Rabbi of the U.K.*

Moses' second question to God at the burning bush was, Who are you? "So I will go to the Israelites and say, 'Your fathers' God sent me to you.' They will immediately ask me what His name is. What shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13). God's reply, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, wrongly translated in almost every Christian Bible as something like "I am that I am," deserves an essay in its own right (I deal with it in my books Future Tense and The Great Partnership).

"His first question, though, was, Mi anochi, "Who am I?" (Ex. 3:11).

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" said Moses to God. *"And how can I possibly get the Israelites out of Egypt?*" On the surface the meaning is clear. Moses is asking two things. The first: who am I, to be worthy of so great a mission? The second: how can I possibly succeed?

God answers the second. *"Because I will be with you."* You will succeed because I am not asking you to do it alone. I am not really asking you to do it at all. I will be doing it for you. I want you to be My representative, My mouthpiece, My emissary and My voice.

God never answered the first question. Perhaps in a strange way Moses answered himself. In Tanakh as a whole, the people who turn out to be the most worthy are the ones who deny they are worthy at all. The prophet Isaiah, when charged with his mission, said, 'I *am a man of unclean lips'* (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said, *'I cannot speak, for I am a child'* (Jer. 1:6). David, Israel's greatest king, echoed Moses' words, *'Who am I?'* (2 Samuel 7:18). Jonah, sent on a mission by God, tried to run away. According to Rashbam, Jacob was about to run away when he found his way blocked by the man/angel with whom he wrestled at night (Rashbam to Gen. 32:23).

The heroes of the Bible are not figures from Greek or any other kind of myth. They are not people possessed of a sense of destiny, determined from an early age to achieve fame. They do not have what the Greeks called megalopsychia, a proper sense of their own worth, a gracious and lightly worn superiority. They did not go to Eton or Oxford. They were not born to rule. They were people who doubted their own abilities. There were times when they felt like giving up. Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah reached points of such despair that they prayed to die. They became heroes of the moral life against their will. There was work to be done – God told them so – and they did it. It is almost as if a sense of smallness is a sign of greatness. So God never answered Moses' question, *"Why me?"*

But there is another question within the question. *"Who am I?"* can be not just a question about worthiness. It can also be a question about identity. Moses, alone on Mount Horeb/Sinai, summoned by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, is not just speaking to God when he says those words. He is also speaking to himself. *"Who am I?"*

There are two possible answers. The first: Moses is a prince of Egypt. He had been adopted as a baby by Pharaoh's daughter. He had grown up in the royal palace. He dressed like an Egyptian, looked and spoke like an Egyptian. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from some rough shepherds, they go back and tell their father, *"An Egyptian saved us"* (2:19). His very name, Moses, was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:10). It was, presumably, an Egyptian name (in fact, Moses, as in Ramses, is the ancient Egyptian word for "child." The etymology given in the Torah, that Moses means *"I drew him from the water,"* tells us what the word suggested to Hebrew speakers). So the first answer is that Moses was an Egyptian prince.

The second was that he was a Midianite. For, although he was Egyptian by upbringing, he had been forced to leave. He had made his home in Midian, married a Midianite woman Zipporah, daughter of a Midianite priest and was "content to live" there, quietly as a shepherd. We tend to forget that he spent many years there. He left Egypt as a young man and was already eighty years old at the start of his mission when he first stood before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:7). He must have spent the overwhelming majority of his adult life in Midian, far away from the Israelites on the one hand and the Egyptians on the other. Moses was a Midianite.

So when Moses asks, "Who am I?" it is not just that he feels himself unworthy. He feels himself uninvolved. He may have been Jewish by birth, but he had not suffered the fate of his people. He had not grown up as a Jew. He had not lived among Jews. He had good reason to doubt that the Israelites would even recognise him as one of them. How, then, could he become their leader? More penetratingly, why should he even think of becoming their leader? Their fate was not his. He was not part of it. He was not responsible for it. He did not suffer from it. He was not implicated in it.

What is more, the one time he had actually tried to intervene in their affairs – he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who had killed an Israelite slave, and the next day tried to *stop two Israelites from fighting one another – his intervention was not welcomed. "*Who made you ruler and judge over us?" they said to him. These are the first recorded words of an Israelite to Moses. He had not yet dreamed of being a leader and already his leadership was being challenged.

Consider, now, the choices Moses faced in his life. On the one hand he could have lived as a prince of Egypt, in luxury and at ease. That might have been his fate had he not intervened. Even afterward, having been forced to flee, he could have lived out his days quietly as a shepherd, at peace with the Midianite family into which he had married. It is not surprising that when God invited him to lead the Israelites to freedom, he resisted.

Why then did he accept? Why did God know that he was the man for the task? One hint is contained in the name he gave his first son. He called him Gershom because, he said, *"I am a stranger in a foreign land"* (2:22). He did not feel at home in Midian. That was where he was, but not who he was.

But the real clue is contained in an earlier verse, the prelude to his first intervention. *"When Moses was grown, he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labour"* (2:11).

These people were his people. He may have looked like an Egyptian but he knew that ultimately he was not. It was a transforming moment, not unlike when the Moabite Ruth said to her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi, *"Your people will be my people and your God my God"* (Ruth 1:16). Ruth was un-Jewish by birth. Moses was un-Jewish by upbringing. But both knew that when they saw suffering and identified with the sufferer, they could not walk away.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called this a covenant of fate, brit goral. It lies at the heart of Jewish identity to this day. There are Jews who believe and those who don't. There are Jews who practise and those who don't. But there are few Jews indeed who, when their people are suffering, can walk away saying, This has nothing to do with me.

Maimonides, who defines this as "separating yourself from the community" (poresh mi-darkhei ha-tsibbur, Hilkhot Teshuva 3:11), says that it is one of the sins for which you are denied a share in the world to come. This is what the Hagaddah means when it says of the wicked son that "because he excludes himself from the collective, he denies a fundamental principle of faith." What fundamental principle of faith? Faith in the collective fate and destiny of the Jewish people.

Who am I? asked Moses, but in his heart he knew the answer. I am not Moses the Egyptian or Moses the Midianite. When I see my people suffer I am, and cannot be other than, Moses the Jew. And if that imposes responsibilities on me, then I must shoulder them. For I am who I am because my people are who they are.

That is Jewish identity, then and now.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. For older Devrei Torah, footnotes are not always available.

https://rabbisacks.org/i-shemot-5777/

The Cyclical Exodus: An Essay on Parshat Shemot

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) * © Chabad 2021

The book of Genesis deals with the life stories of the nation's patriarchs and matriarchs, beginning with Abraham, continuing with Isaac, and ending with Jacob and his sons. Essentially, these are narratives about individuals. The book of Exodus puts the focus, for the first time, on the Jewish people, not as a list of individuals but as a whole nation. With this begins a new narrative in the Torah — the story of the Jewish people. To be sure, in the book of Exodus as well, much attention is focused on the life of Moses. However, his story is the story of the Jewish people's emergence, in which the story of Moses the individual occupies only a subordinate place.

The Genesis narratives are certainly important, and they, too, have national significance, as our sages say, "The experiences of the patriarchs prefigure the history of their descendants."1 Nevertheless, in and of themselves, they are still narratives on a small scale. From Exodus onward, however, the narrative is on a much larger scale; it is the narrative of the Jewish people as a whole. Hence, even the minor narratives in Exodus have greater significance for us than the Genesis narratives do.

The Exodus from Egypt

The major and central narrative in the book of Exodus is undoubtedly the story of the Exodus from Egypt: the experience of exile and the process of leaving it. The Exodus is a central theme not only in the book of Exodus but in Jewish life in general. An examination of the siddur reveals that we mention the Exodus at every opportunity, both when there is a clear and obvious connection, such as on Pesach, and when the connection is less obvious as well, such as on all the other festivals — Shavuot, Sukkot, Rosh HaShana, and Yom Kippur. Even in the text of the Kiddush that we recite each Shabbat, the Exodus features prominently.

The Egyptian exile and the Exodus are, for us, far more than the specific historical narrative that appears in the book of Exodus; they are basic elements within our being. The exile and the redemption in Exodus were not a one-time event, but merely the paradigm for an event that recurs again and again throughout our history — exile followed by redemption followed by exile again — and thus the metamorphosis of the Jewish people continues.

These processes of exile and redemption exist on an even larger plane, as the basis of the entire world. The Jewish people are not the only ones who experience these stages; all of humanity does so as well. This does not happen in the same way and on the same level for every person or every group of people, but these are basic stages in the life process of everyone, individuals and nations alike.

We go through this cycle in the course of our individual lives. Some people spend sixty years in Egypt and ten years in the wilderness, some spend forty years in Egypt and forty years in the wilderness, and some merit a more generous division: They spend a short period of time in exile followed by a longer time in the redemption stage. But on the whole, the human life cycle always adheres to this process: There is a stage of exile, of difficulties and problems, followed by a stage of redemption, of bursting through the difficulties and the problems, and the cycle continues.

Scientists often speak of basic structures of which everything that exists in the world is merely a copy. For example, almost all forms of matter share the same type of molecular bonds, which serve to join together the tiny particles present in any material. Whether the material is as simple as salt or as complex as a hormone, every form of matter has a basic structure that repeats itself in other instances throughout the universe. Correspondingly, the cycle of the Egyptian exile and the Exodus is the prototype for this central pattern that we continue to experience, both as a community and as individuals, in a variety of forms.

The simple reason for mentioning the Exodus daily is not just to recall the historical story; rather, it is because the life cycle and even the daily cycle always follow this pattern. The cycle of exile and redemption forms the basis of our lives, and in this respect the story of the Exodus exists on a different plane from the other stories in the Torah; it is the central story of existence.

The Torah relates two universal stories: the story of Creation and the story of the Exodus. The story of Creation is a pattern that begins with a perfect world — the world of the Garden of Eden — and reaches a crisis that necessitates a resolution — in this case, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden. Although this is the story of all of existence, nevertheless, it is not exactly what we encounter every day. Our world is not built like the Garden of Eden — it is certainly not a perfect world. To be sure, it is important to know that such a world once existed, but in our individual experience and in human life in general, we do not encounter it. We start out in a different kind of world, one that is patterned after the Exodus. Our world is built on the reality of exile, a complex existence with problems and difficulties. In the midst of exile, we must endeavor to ultimately attain redemption.

The meaning of exile

We see that exile is not an accidental state — neither in our own history nor in the world in general. Therefore, understanding exile is all the more important. It is clear that exile is not a pleasant existence and that it entails various difficulties. But what is the essence of the problem with exile? What is its fundamental difficulty?

Exile has inherent significance beyond the reality of being unable to live in one's desired geographic location — in our case, the Land of Israel. When we say that the Jewish people is in exile, this is more than a determination of place, for exile is a state that is intrinsically problematic, not just because of its geographic location.

The problem of exile as it has been described as follows: "Your descendants will be strangers in a land not theirs"2 is tolerable — it is just a stay in another country. Does the true exile begin when "they will be enslaved and oppressed"? Perhaps, in determining whether a certain country is considered "exile," one need only check whether he is subjected to oppression. If he is oppressed, this is indeed exile; if he is not oppressed, then it is merely another country outside the Land of Israel. Hence, people might argue today that while life in Syria was certainly exile, life in America does not qualify as exile, because in America neither "and they will be enslaved" nor "and oppressed" apply.

In truth, it appears that exilic existence involves a more fundamental problem. The essential point of exile is that something is not where it should be, in its appropriate place. In the normal course of things, it may be that a person temporarily resides outside his homeland. The new place may be uncomfortable for him, but that is not yet considered an exilic existence. Nowadays, when a Frenchman moves to Canada, he may feel like a "stranger," but this is not an essential problem that creates a life of exile for him. If a carp is transferred from a pool near Atlit to a pool near Nahariya, it may have difficulty adapting, but being in one pool or the other is not an essential difference for it. Regardless of the pool in which it ends up, it is in an appropriate place for a fish. But when a fish is taken out of water altogether, whether this occurs near Atlit or Nahariya, or whether it was treated properly or not is irrelevant; it is in a place that is fundamentally inappropriate and, for a fish, life-threatening as well.

Individual or collective?

There are several stages to the Egyptian exile. The People of Israel settle in Egypt over a long period, and not all of this period is considered exile, certainly not in the true sense. Jacob and his family travel to Egypt of their own volition, willingly and for their own good. When, then, does their existence become one of exile? Where is the dividing line?

It appears that the oppression of the Egyptian exile begins only when Pharaoh says to his people, "Behold, the People of Israel are too numerous and strong for us."3 The beginning of the Egyptian exile hinges on the Egyptians' perception that Israel is a foreign nation — they sense Israel's foreignness. As long as this awareness is lacking, and the Egyptians relate to the People of Israel as individuals, this is not yet exile; the People of Israel are merely strangers.

Exile hinges on whether the person is part of a collective or a separate individual. When individuals, even a large number of them, are in another country, they may be considered foreigners, strangers in a strange land; but when there is a whole collective, an entire nation, in a place that is inappropriate for it — that is exile. For this reason, one of the ways in which Diaspora Jews often seek to solve the problem of exile is by attempting to ignore their collective identity. They want their countrymen to relate to them as to individuals, not as parts of a whole. They avow that they are Jewish only by chance,

just as a Turk happens to have been born in Turkey and an Italian happens to have been born in Italy — they do not belong to the Jewish collective. Once these individuals remove themselves from the collective, then although they are not in their true homeland, and they are different in many ways from their non-Jewish neighbors, this is an individualized problem and not one of exile.

Even in the reality of Egyptian bondage, there surely were Jews who took such an approach. Imagine a Jew living in Egypt who is suddenly forced into slavery and ordered to work with mortar and bricks. These decrees are certainly not pleasant for him, so what does he do? The first thing he thinks of is how to advance in rank — how to be appointed a foreman and not merely a regular worker. After becoming a foreman, he continues to rise in rank, becoming a taskmaster, and then rises further in the ranks until he finds a more desirable position. This Jew sees the problem as a personal one — a problem connected to his place and his personal situation — and he relates to the problem correspondingly. From his standpoint, the general state of things is, on the whole, in order. Therefore, if he is not content with where he is, or if something is bothering him, he adapts by simply changing his position, shifting to a more personally comfortable place, but doing nothing to fundamentally change his situation.

Awareness of exile and redemption

One who relates to himself strictly as an individual will never leave Egypt. He manages to convince himself that he has it good — so things are good for him; why should he change? Only one who is aware of his situation, who understands that he is in exile, has a chance of leaving it for the “good and spacious land.”

Awareness of exile begins the moment there is a sense, which sometimes comes from within and sometimes comes from without, that the problem is not just a personal problem but an overall problem of disharmony. When there is awareness of exile, the problem is no longer how to make small adjustments within the reality but how to get out of this place entirely.

Awareness of exile is the awareness of the need for a revolution — that is, for a fundamental change in the order of the existing reality. One who considers himself a stranger is likely to think, for example, that he gets the worst jobs only because he does not yet have citizenship in his resident country. So he will try to attain citizenship and suffice himself with that localized solution. Only a feeling of essentially not belonging to the place in which one resides can bring an individual or a nation to move out. Only such a feeling will lead to an awareness of the fundamental problem of exile and produce the need for a revolution.

Emergence from exile requires an essential change, because the whole essence of redemption is revolution, an essential change in the world order. This point bears on a simple question that commonly arises: Does everyone who moves to Israel necessarily emerge from exile? What happens, for instance, when someone moves from a Jewish city like Miami Beach to a Jewish city like Jerusalem? In such cases, what usually happens is that the person, for some reason, is not comfortable in his hometown. The seaside weather is too humid, perhaps, and he prefers to live in Jerusalem’s drier climate. Or perhaps he wants to send his children to a Belz cheder, which is lacking in his hometown. In any case, he moves to Jerusalem, and all is well in the end. In all other respects, from his standpoint, there is no essential difference between the two places, and his life remains fundamentally unchanged. In such cases, there are two possibilities: either the exile was not really exile, or the redemption was not really redemption.

These two states — exile and redemption — go together; they are interconnected. It is precisely a person’s awareness that he is in exile that creates the opening through which he may emerge from that exile and attain redemption. So long as one accepts as a given the framework of the existing reality, he will never be able to recognize the possibility of redemption. So long as one sees the problems as a handful of disagreeable details within a reality in which he basically feels at home, he has no reason to take action to change that reality. Only when a person comes to the realization that he lives in exile — that the situation is fundamentally out of order — only then can he begin to discuss redemption, an essential change in the reality.

The existence of exile and the possibility of attaining redemption are, thus, bound up with the fundamental question of how the individual views the reality of his life. The moment one comes to the awareness that his reality is not as it should be and that it must be changed on an essential level is the very moment when he can begin the process of redemption.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Tanchuma, Lech Lecha 9; Nachmanides on Genesis 12:6.

2. Gen. 15:13.

3. Ex. 1:9.

* Rabbi Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) (1937-2020) was internationally regarded as one of the leading rabbis of this century. The author of many books, he was best known for his monumental translation of and commentary on the Talmud.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/4992072/jewish/The-Cyclical-Exodus.htm

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Jewish Identity
An Insight from the Rebbe
by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky * © Chabad 2021

These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt: (Exodus 1:1)

The Jews' physical exile was their forced slavery; their spiritual exile was their psychological enslavement to their hosts' culture. Although Jews assimilated because of their exile, others struggled to retain their Jewish identity, refusing to give up even such incidental aspects of their heritage as their Jewish names and language because of their faith in their destiny.

It was only after revealing their inner identity in response to the challenge of exile that the Jewish people could proceed to the next phase — receiving the Torah. The purpose of the Torah is to teach us how to bring Divine consciousness into the most mundane aspects of life, even those that initially oppose G-dliness. In exile, the Jewish people learned how to overcome even these forces.

The same applies to our present exile: holding on tenaciously to our traditions — even those that appear to be unimportant — will hasten our redemption. The challenges that we overcome, both as individuals and as a people, purify and prepare us for the exalted Divine revelations that will accompany the imminent, final Redemption

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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

On Not Obeying Immoral Orders

The opening chapters of Exodus plunge us into the midst of epic events. Almost at a stroke the Israelites are transformed from protected minority to slaves. Moses passes from prince of Egypt to Midianite shepherd to leader of the Israelites through a history-changing encounter at the Burning Bush. Yet it is one small, often overlooked episode that deserves to be seen as a turning-point in the history of humanity. Its heroines are two remarkable women, Shifra and Puah.

We do not know who they were. The Torah gives us no further information about them other than that they were midwives, instructed by Pharaoh: 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live' (Ex. 1:16). The Hebrew description of the two women as hameyaldot ha'ivriyot is ambiguous. It could mean "the Hebrew midwives"; so most translations and commentaries read it. But it could equally mean, "the midwives to the Hebrews," in which case they may have been Egyptian. That is how Josephus,[1] Abarbanel and Samuel David Luzzatto understand it, arguing that it is simply implausible to suppose that Hebrew women would have been party to an act of genocide against their own people.

What we do know, however, is that they refused to carry out the order:

"The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the King of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17).

This is the first recorded instance in history of civil disobedience: refusing to obey an order, given by the most powerful man in the most powerful empire of the ancient world, simply because it was immoral, unethical, inhuman.

The Torah suggests that they did so without fuss or drama. Summoned by Pharaoh to explain their behaviour, they simply replied: "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive" (Ex. 1:19). To this, Pharaoh had no reply. The matter-of-factness of the entire incident reminds us of one of the most salient findings about the courage of those who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. They had little in common except for the fact that they saw nothing remarkable in what they did. [2] Often the mark of real moral heroes is that they do not see themselves as moral heroes. They do what they do because that is what a human being is supposed to do. That is probably the meaning of the statement that they "feared God." It is the Torah's generic description of those who have a moral sense. [3]

It took more than three thousand years for what the midwives did to become enshrined in international law. In 1946, the Nazi war criminals on trial at Nuremberg all offered the defence that they were merely obeying orders, given by a duly constituted and democratically elected government. Under the doctrine of national sovereignty every government has the right to issue its own laws and order its own affairs. It took a new legal concept, namely a 'crime against humanity', to establish the guilt of the architects and administrators of genocide.

The Nuremberg principle gave legal substance to what the midwives instinctively understood: that there are some orders that should not be obeyed, because they are immoral. Moral law transcends and may override the law of the state. As the Talmud puts it:

"If there is a conflict between the words of the Master [God] and the words of a disciple [a human being], the words of the Master must prevail" (Kiddushin 42b).

The Nuremberg trials were not the first occasion on which the story of the midwives had a significant impact on history. Throughout the Middle Ages the Church, knowing that knowledge is power and therefore preferring to keep it exclusively in the hands of the priesthood, had forbidden vernacular translations of the Bible. In the course of the sixteenth century, three developments changed this irrevocably. First was the Reformation, with its maxim Sola scriptura, "By Scripture alone," placing the Bible centre-stage in the religious life.

Second was the invention, in the mid-fifteenth century, of printing. Lutherans were convinced that this was Divine Providence. God had sent the printing press so that the doctrines of the Reformed church could be spread worldwide.

Third was the fact that some people, regardless of the ban, had translated the Bible anyway. John Wycliffe and his followers had done so in the fourteenth century, but the most influential rebel was William Tyndale whose translation of the New Testament, begun in 1525, became the first printed Bible in English. He paid for this with his life.

When Queen Mary I took the Church of England back to Catholicism, many English Protestants fled to Calvin's Geneva, where they produced a new translation, based on Tyndale, called the Geneva Bible. Produced in a small, affordable edition, it was smuggled into England in large numbers. Able to read the Bible by themselves for the first time, people soon discovered that it was, as far as monarchy is concerned, a highly seditious document.

It tells of how God told Samuel that in seeking to appoint a King, the Israelites were rejecting Him as their only Sovereign. It describes graphically how the Prophets were unafraid to challenge Kings, which they did with the authority of God Himself. And it told the story of the midwives who refused to carry out Pharaoh's order. On this, in a marginal note, the Geneva Bible endorses their refusal, criticising only the fact that, in explaining their behaviour, they told a lie. The note says, "Their disobedience herein was lawful, but their dissembling evil."

King James understood clearly the dire implication of that one sentence. It meant that a King could be disobeyed on the authority of God Himself: a clear and categorical refutation of the idea of the Divine right of Kings.[4] Eventually, unable to stop the spread of Bibles in translation, King James decided to commission his own version which appeared in 1611. But by then the damage had been done and the seeds of what became the English revolution had been planted. Throughout the seventeenth century, by far the most influential force in English politics was the Hebrew Bible as understood by the Puritans, and it was the Pilgrim Fathers who took this faith with them on their journey to what would eventually become the United States of America.

A century and a half later, it was the work of another English radical, Thomas Paine, that made a decisive impact on the American revolution. His pamphlet, Common Sense, was published in America in January 1776 and became an instant best seller, selling 100,000 copies almost immediately. Its impact was huge, and because of it he became known as "the father of the American Revolution." Despite the fact that Paine was an atheist, the opening pages of Common Sense, justifying rebellion against a tyrannical King, are entirely based on citations from the Hebrew Bible. In the same spirit, that summer Benjamin Franklin drew, as his design for the Great Seal of America, a picture of the Egyptians (i.e. the English) drowning in the Red Sea (i.e. the Atlantic), with the caption, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Thomas

Jefferson was so struck by the sentence that he recommended it to be used on the Great Seal of Virginia, and later incorporated it in his personal seal.

The story of the midwives belongs to a larger vision implicit throughout the Torah and Tanach as a whole: that right is sovereign over might, and that even God Himself can be called to account in the name of justice, as He expressly mandates Abraham to do. Sovereignty ultimately belongs to God, so any human act or order that transgresses the will of God is by that fact alone ultra vires. These revolutionary ideas are intrinsic to the biblical vision of politics and the use of power.

In the end, though, it was the courage of two remarkable women that created the precedent later taken up by the American writer Thoreau[5] in his classic essay Civil Disobedience (1849) that in turn inspired Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in the twentieth century. Their story also ends with a lovely touch. The text says:

"So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them houses" (Ex. 1:20-21).

Luzzatto interpreted this last phrase to mean that He gave them families of their own. Often, he wrote, midwives are women who are unable to have children. In this case, God blessed Shifra and Puah by giving them children, as he had done for Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel.

This too is a not unimportant point. The closest Greek literature comes to the idea of civil disobedience is the story of Antigone who insisted on giving her brother Polynices a burial despite the fact that King Creon had refused to permit it, regarding him as a traitor to Thebes. Sophocles' Antigone is a tragedy: the heroine must die because of her loyalty to her brother and her disobedience to the King. By contrast, the Hebrew Bible is not a tragedy. In fact biblical Hebrew has no word meaning "tragedy" in the Greek sense. Good is rewarded, not punished, because the universe, God's work of art, is a world in which moral behaviour is blessed and evil, briefly in the ascendant, is ultimately defeated.

Shifra and Puah are two of the great heroines of world literature, the first to teach humanity the moral limits of power.

[1] Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, II.9.2.
[2] See James Q. Wilson, The Moral Sense, New York, Free Press, 1993, pp. 35-39, and the literature cited there.
[3] See, for example, Gen. 20:11.
[4] See Christopher Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution, London: Allen Lane, 1993.
[5] See Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience, Boston: David R. Godine, 1969, first published in 1849.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"And Pharaoh commanded his entire nation saying, every male baby born must be thrown into the Nile, while every female baby shall be allowed to live." (Exodus 1:22)

In decreeing the destruction of the Israelites in Egypt, why does Pharaoh distinguish between the genders? Apparently afraid to keep the Israelite men alive lest they wage a rebellion against him, Pharaoh is confident that the Israelite women will not pose a threat, as they will presumably marry Egyptian men and assimilate into Egyptian society.

This strategy underscores Pharaoh's ignorance – or denial – of the pivotal role women play in the development of a nation, and stands in stark contrast to the perspective of our Sages [Midrash Yalkut Shimoni], who declare that it was "in the merit of the righteous Israelite women that the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt".

The Talmud [Shabbat 118b] teaches, "I always call my wife 'my home," since the real bulwark of the home is the woman of the house. As the Jewish nation emerged from a family, and family units are the bedrock of every society, it is clearly the women who are of supreme importance.

Pharaoh was blind to this. Apparently, he had no tradition of matriarchs such as Sarah and Rebecca, who directed the destiny of a national mission. For him, women were the weaker gender who were there to be used and taken advantage of. This is why Pharaoh attempts to utilize the Hebrew midwives to do his dirty work of actually murdering the male babies on the birth stools. To his surprise, the women rebelled: "And the midwives feared the Lord, so they did not do what the king of Egypt told them to do; they kept the male babies alive" (ibid. 1:17).

Taking it one step further, the Talmud [Sotah 11b] identifies the Israelite midwives as Yocheved (the mother of Moses and Aaron) and Miriam, their sister. The Midrash continues that Amram, their husband and father, respectively, was the head of the Israelite court. Upon learning of Pharaoh's decree to destroy all male babies, he ruled that Israelite couples divorce, in order to cease reproduction. After all, why should people continue normal married life, only to have their baby sons killed?

Miriam chides her father: "Your decree is harsher than that of Pharaoh! He made a decree only against male babies, but you are making a decree against female babies, as well." Amram, persuaded by his daughter's rebuke, remarries Yocheved, who conceives and gives birth to Moses, savior of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Miriam is actually following in a fine family tradition of fortitude and optimism. Her grandmothers, the mothers of Amram and Yocheved, gave birth to children during the bleakest days of oppression. Despite the slavery and carnage all around, one mother gives her son the name Amram, which means "exalted nation"; the other mother gives her daughter the name Yocheved, which means "glory to God." Such was their confidence in the potential of the Jewish People and their faith in the Source of their people's greatness.

These two women were able to look beyond the dreadful state to which the Israelites had fallen in Egypt; their sights were held high, upon the stars of the heavens which God promised Abraham would symbolize his progeny and the Covenant of the Pieces which guaranteed the Hebrews a glorious future in the Land of Israel. These two proud grandmothers from the tribe of Levi merited grandchildren such as Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Pharaoh begins to learn his lesson when Moses asks for a three-day journey in the desert; Pharaoh wants to know who will go. Moses insists: "Our youth and our old people will go, our sons and our daughters will go – our entire households will go, our women as well as our men" [ibid. 10:8]. A wiser Pharaoh will now only allow the men to leave; he now understands that he has most to fear from the women!

And so it is no wonder that Passover, the festival of our freedom, is celebrated in the Torah with "a lamb for each house," with the women included in the paschal sacrificial meal by name no less than the men. In our time, we find this idea expressed in the observances of the Passover Seder (the drinking of the four cups of wine, the eating of matza, and the telling of the story of the exodus, etc.), which are binding on women no less than men.

A post-script - One of my strongest childhood memories take place at a Seder at the home of my maternal grandparents. The entire family, including the seven married children of my grandparents, as well as their children, comprised well over fifty participants, My grandfather led the entire gathering in the reading of the Haggadah word for word; when anyone had a question about any of the passages, he or she was encouraged to ask. My grandfather would then always defer to my grandmother to give the answer, because he greatly respected the fact that she had learned Talmud with her father, the Dayan (rabbinical court judge) Rav Shlomo Kowalsky. Indeed, during the Seder, when my grandmother would go into the kitchen to check on the pots of food, my grandfather would stop the Haggadah reading until my grandmother re-joined us at the table, and only then would the Seder continue.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Imagining Redemption

Jewish people will begin our rapid and inexorable march toward Passover this week. For it is on this Shabbat that we begin the book of Shemot, the story of the Exodus. And henceforth, for many weeks, every weekly Torah portion deals, in a dazzling variety of ways, with the drama of our servitude and our redemption, with the heroes of the Exodus and with its villains.

Each parsha, for the next many Shabbatot, provides us with a not-to-be-missed opportunity to prepare ourselves, intellectually and spiritually, for the wonderful holiday which lies ahead.

Somehow, more than any other Jewish holiday, we tend to speak of "preparing" for Passover. These preparations entail a variety of activities. Cleaning the house, for example, and making sure that none of the foods forbidden on Pesach, even in minute quantities, are to be found. This certainly is an onerous chore. Purchasing the provisions for quite a few festive meals is an expensive and time-consuming task. Another important task is assuring that there are sufficient quantities of the ritual foods such as matzah and marror, the ingredients for charoset, and sufficient wine for the entire household. And a proper Seder table requires appropriate decorations, which include tablecloths, silverware, candlesticks, goblets, and often floral arrangements and embroidered pillowcases and matzoh coverlets.

The more scholarly among us will spend significant time intellectually preparing for the festival. The Talmud tells us that the proper length of time necessary to review the laws and customs of Passover is thirty days, beginning on the day of Purim and extending throughout the entire Passover holiday. Preparation must also involve at least a perusal of several haggadot, if not careful study of at least some of one's personal favorite haggadot.

But I have often thought that we are called upon for an extremely unique and quite challenging preparation which is often overlooked. I refer to the passage in the haggadah which originates in the Mishnah and which reads: In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself, lirot et atzmo, as if he personally left Egypt, as it is written, "And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.'" (Exodus 13:8).

Note the underlined phrase: "for me when I went free." We are called upon to personally visualize ourselves as having experienced the Exodus in all of its detail. How many of us are capable of such an imaginative feat?

For me, this is the greatest challenge of the entire Passover experience: imagining myself, picturing myself, as a helpless slave and then reliving the frustration of the initial phases of the redemption process; personally witnessing a series of wondrous miracles; living through the original Passover experience, safely protected in our slave quarters while, hurriedly and almost surreptitiously, gulping down that first Passover festive meal.

And feeling, in the depths of my bones, the burst of sudden freedom, casting aside bonds and chains, and marching as a free man into an unknown wilderness. Is this not an almost impossible task? Can I possibly relive the powerful emotions that my ancestors felt millennia ago? How am I to "see myself as if I personally left Egypt"?

It is in response to such questions that I suggest a careful reading of all the Torah portions that we will be encountering, beginning this Shabbat and continuing for the next many weeks. My plan is to devote my columns for each of those weeks to a suggestion or two which might prove helpful in achieving this goal of creatively reimagining the entire experience as if we were there.

Let us begin our adventure with a teaching of the great commentator, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, Ramban, or Nachmanides. He provides a brief introduction to the entire Chumash Shemot, commonly called the Book of Exodus. But the very point of his introduction is to reject the common title of this second book of the Bible. Instead, he insists that the book be known as the "Book of Redemption," Sefer HaGeulah. Why is he so insistent on his choice of this unusual title for this sacred and multi-themed book? And what does geulah, redemption, even mean?

Ramban considers the second book of the Torah to be the sequel to the first book, which is commonly referred to as the book of Genesis. For Ramban, Genesis is primarily a book about the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is less a book about the creation of the universe than it is a book about the creation of the people of Israel. Its theme is "the status of our forefathers," by which he means the ethical and moral stature of our first ancestors.

With the descent of our people into Egypt, exile, and slavery, there is a loss of "the status of our forefathers," a diminution of their ethical and moral stature. Redemption is the process by which we regain that status, that ethical and moral stature. Redemption is not the Exodus from Egyptian bondage. Rather, it involves the revelation at Sinai, the construction of the Tabernacle, and, ideally and ultimately, the return to the Land of Israel. Redemption is the reclaiming of the ethical and moral stature of our patriarchs.

Following this approach, the requirement of "seeing ourselves as if we personally left Egypt" is less about imagining ourselves as slaves, or even imagining ourselves as marching out of Egypt as free men. Instead, it is about the implications of freedom for our reclamation of the ethical and moral stature of our forefathers.

Ramban offers us a profound insight: a slave, a person in bondage, is not free to act ethically and morally. This is certainly true of a person who is literally enslaved. But it is also true of one whose choices in life are dictated by political propaganda, cultural influence, pressures to conform blindly, and other forces with which we are all very familiar nowadays.

Ramban's thirteenth century concept of "the status of our forefathers" is explained beautifully in the nineteenth century commentary of Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin, known as the Netziv, in his introductory remarks to the book of Genesis. For the Netziv, the defining quality of our Patriarchs was the characteristic of yashrut, which he defines as an ethic that transcends piety and saintliness and extends to the ability to relate to people very different from oneself, working together with others in a harmonious and constructive fashion.

We now know of one way that we can "see ourselves as if we have left Egypt." To do so, we must each come to grips with what it means for us to experience redemption. Following Ramban and Netziv, our charge is to reclaim what the former calls the "status of our forefathers" and what the latter terms the ability to act yashar. We must improve our ethical conduct, our interpersonal relationships, by cooperating with others in our surroundings and especially with those who are different from us. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were yesharim, and it is by emulating their "status" that we "leave Egypt," depart bondage, and experience redemption.

Please join me again next week as we explore other approaches to the difficult task of "seeing ourselves as if we left Egypt."

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Deeper Meaning of "Who Did Not Know Yosef"

In the beginning of Parshas Shemos, the pasuk says "And a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Yosef." [Shemos 1:8]. The simple meaning of "who did not know Yosef" is he either acted like he did not know Yosef or he purposely forgot about him. However there is perhaps a deeper meaning in the words as well.

We learn in these next several parshiyos what a terrible person Pharaoh was. Besides throwing all male children into the Nile, Chazal go so far as to say that Pharaoh became a leper and (based on conventional medical wisdom of those days) would bathe in the blood of children as a supposed cure for the disease. He would slaughter Jewish children and bathe in

their blood. Words are insufficient to describe the wickedness of this murderous tyrant.

Yet, the first indictment the Torah levels at Pharaoh was that "he did not know Yosef." He forgot what this great and righteous individual did for his country and denied that Egypt owed Yosef or his descendants any gratitude. Any person with a shred of decency would say "How could I do this to the Jewish people? If not for them, we would all have starved to death." Pharaoh's decline into the terrible things he later did began with the fact that he was not a makir tova. He did not recognize the kindness he owed the Jewish people. He didn't remember the favor that Yosef did for him.

This is the simple meaning of "Asher Lo Yadah es Yosef." But there is a deeper intent as well. In Parshas VaYeshev, when Yosef was being seduced by Potiphar's wife, the pasuk says he left his garment (beged) in her hands. The Ramban there asks: Yosef was obviously stronger than Potiphar's wife. The garment that he left in her hands provided the incriminating evidence against him. Why did he not simply grab the shirt from her so that she would not have any evidence that he tried to "attack" her. He could have saved himself from all those years in jail!

The Ramban says an incredible thing: Out of respect to his master's wife, he refused to grab his garment back from her. He felt it would be ungrateful on his part to rudely and violently grab something out of the hands of a woman whose husband took him into their home and provided him with food and shelter.

We thus have a study in contrast: Yosef HaTzadik is willing to risk his entire future because he feels a sense of hakaras haTov and gratitude to Potiphar and his wife. He is willing to wind up in jail rather than be rude to his master's wife. This is one end of the spectrum. Pharaoh is at the other end of the spectrum. He is willing to kill the Jewish people, the family of Yosef, and ignore the great debt of gratitude he should have had for this nation.

This gives us a deeper understanding of what the Torah means when it says about the Egyptian king "who did not know Yosef." He did not have an understanding of what it means to be a Yosef. Yosef was someone to whom Pharaoh could simply not relate on a spiritual level!

One Projects His Own Shortcomings on Everyone Else

The following is an example of the popular expression: What Peter says about Paul says more about Peter than it says about Paul.

The pesukim immediately following the expression "who did not know Yosef" read as follows: "He said to his people: 'Behold! The people, the Children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us act wisely to them lest they become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, they too, may join our enemies, and wage war against us and go up from the land." [Shemos 1:9-10]

Pharaoh tells his people: "We need to do something about these Jews. The next thing you know, they will become a fifth column. They will gang up with our enemies and destroy us." Why in the world would Pharaoh think that? Why would the Jews possibly act that way? Where was Pharaoh's evidence to these serious charges?

The answer is that someone who is not a makir tova himself, will think that everyone else has the same character fault! The Talmud calls this "Kol haPosel, b'Mumo Posel" [Kidushin 70a] (Anyone who invalidates others, invalidates them by charging them with his own shortcomings). Since Pharaoh could not be appreciative of what the Jewish people did for him, Pharaoh assumed the Jewish people would likewise be disloyal to him. He projected his own inability to be grateful on everyone else: "These people will gang up against us. They will become a fifth column."

We see this principle at play in several incidents in Shas. The Gemara [Avodah Zarah 70a] states that a convert named Issur Giyura commented "When I was a Goy, I did not believe that Jews kept Shabbos. I figured if Jews really kept Shabbos, I would find many more 'lost' items in the street (abandoned by Jews caught on the road at sundown)." From where does that come? It is because Issur Giyura, as a non-Jew, could not believe – Jews are going to give up money for Shabbos? Since he did not find an abundance of dropped wallets on the street, he convinced himself that it could not be that Jews kept Shabbos!

This attitude comes from the same school of thought as Pharaoh's assumption of the Jews' future disloyalty. How someone views the world himself is how he assumes that others view the world as well! "If I am not a makir tova, no one else is a makir tova either."

A similar Gemara is found in Sanhedrin (37a): A certain heretic said to Rav Kahana: "I cannot believe that it is permitted for a husband to sleep in the same bedroom as his wife when she is a nidda. How can it be that they will not have relations? It cannot be! What is going to stop them? Is it possible for a fire to come in contact with fiber-chips and not char them?" Rav Kahana responded: The Torah testified about Klal Yisrael that we can be hedged with roses and we will not make breaches through them – i.e., even if we have temptations, we will be able to withstand them.

The heretic could not understand that! From where he was coming, when a person has urges to do something, he immediately must act on those urges. What is there to stop him?

All these stories have a common denominator. Each person in the world views others based on their own perspective of how they think and how they operate.

Amram Did Not Say: "I Am Older; I Know Better!"

The pasuk says in this week's parsha "A man went out from the House of Levi and he married the daughter of Levi." [Shemos 2:1]. The Gemara [Sotah 12a] fills in the blanks of this pasuk. The Talmud tells us that this "man of the House of Levi" (Amram) acted on the advice of his daughter (Miriam). When Pharaoh decreed that all male children were to be thrown into the Nile at the time of their birth, Amram divorced his wife (Yocheved). He sighed "We toil for nothing."

Amram was the Gadol Hador (the leader of the Jewish people in that generation) and he divorced his wife because he did not want to bring any more children into such a world. The Gadol Hador set the example and everyone else followed in his footsteps. His daughter came to him and said, "Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's decree. Pharaoh only decreed death upon the boys who will be born. Your decree affects the boys and the girls! Furthermore, Pharaoh's decree only impacts the children killed at birth in this world; your decree that no children shall be brought into the world impacts the unborn souls both in this world and the next!"

Amram took Miriam's advice and remarried Yocheved. And everyone else did the same. This is what the Gemara says.

Think about it: Amram was THE Gadol Hador to the extent that everyone followed his example. His little daughter came to him and said, "Daddy, this is not a good idea! This is not right!" Miriam was five years old at this time. Imagine if Rav Moshe Feinstein's little daughter or Rav Elyashiv's little daughter had come to them and said: "Daddy, what you are doing is not right!" And then—the great leader of the generation concedes and acts on his daughter's advice! Can we imagine such a scenario?

This teaches us that in spite of the fact that Amram was THE Gadol HaDor, he had the humility to listen to somebody else's advice.

Those people who are incapable of listening to others are going to wind up in deep trouble. Consider the following interesting pesukim:

Shlomo HaMelech writes "Better to run into a mother bear who has just lost her cubs than to run into a fool!" [Mishlei 17:12] This is the advice of the wisest of all men. A fool is the worst thing in the world. If you see him coming down the street at you, run the other way (even if you will be running toward a bereaved grizzly!).

Where does a fool stand in Shlomo's eyes? He stands almost at the bottom of the totem pole. Why do I say "Almost at the bottom?" Because Shlomo says something else in Mishlei [26:12]: "If you see a man who thinks he is wise, a fool is better off than him." Someone who believes he knows more than anyone else is worse than a fool!

Put these pesukim together: Shlomo HaMelech says it is better to face an angry grizzly than to face a fool, and yet the fool is still better than a person who is "wise in his own eyes." Such a person has no hope!

This gives us new insight into the incident with Amram and his daughter. Amram was the greatest man of his generation. Nonetheless, when his little daughter pointed out the fallacy of his action, he had the humility and wisdom to admit that she was right and he was wrong.

Dvar Torah
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Are names boring?
Picture the scene. You're at a simcha, a happy event, and the host stands up, as hosts do, welcomes this one and that one, mentions this relative and the other – so and so who's come from afar and then of course those who are unfortunately not with us. Name after name after name. You're not a member of the family, you're not familiar with these names. Do you find them boring?

Actually no. And that's because you appreciate that some people must be mentioned because it's thanks to them that this simcha is actually taking place. It's because of what they have invested, either recently or way back in the past, to enable those who are celebrating to come together for a most wonderful occasion.
The Book of Names

This shabbat we will read Parshat Shemot, the portion of names, and it comes at the beginning of Sefer Shemot, the book of names. There are so many lists of names in the Torah. Sometimes the names are familiar, often they are not. What's particularly intriguing is that this list of names at the beginning of our parsha are very familiar. They're the children of Yaakov Avinu, those who came originally into Egypt. We already know these names and we know these details. Why is it mentioned right at the beginning of the book?

So the Midrash explains that the Torah here wants us to appreciate the contribution of these tzaddikim. Each and every one of them, says the Midrash, had a pure soul and was a great person.

Rashi adds that these names were mentioned at the end of the book of Bereishit in order to provide praise for what people did in their lifetime. Now these names are mentioned at the beginning of Shemot, to praise them once they had passed away, because their impact continues to be with us.
Appreciation - So the Torah therefore mentions names in order to show appreciation. If not for these great, wonderful people, we wouldn't be here as a nation to this day.

So what is the takeaway for us all? I believe we should be asking ourselves the question, "What does our name mean to others?" Not that we want our name to be on lists that are read out or engraved on buildings but rather, what is the impact we are making? To what degree are we influencing events and people now, and to what extent are we investing in the future of the world?
A good name

Let us ensure that through our deeds, through our words and through everything that we do, we will provide a beracha, a great blessing for those around us. In appreciation of what King Solomon taught,
"Tov shem mishemen tov," – "A good name is more important than the finest of oils."

And the Mishnah teaches,
"V'keter shem tov oleh al gabeihem," – "The crown of a good name supersedes all."

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Civil Disobedience in Judaism
During the past eighty years, the idea of civil disobedience as a political tool has been widely and successfully used. This form of protest has achieved spectacular results in India, leading up to her independence, in the effort of black Americans to achieve equality in the 1960's, and, to some degree, the Arab Spring of recent years. What is the Jewish view of this practice? Is it permitted or even demanded in certain situations? If it is justified, in which circumstances should it be used?

Civil disobedience is the refusal to obey certain immoral laws, for the purpose of influencing government policy, often through non-violent resistance. The very first example of recorded civil disobedience comes from our Parsha. When Pharaoh told the midwives to let Jewish male babies die, they did not listen and ignored the order, choosing instead to fear God instead of Pharaoh and let the babies live (Exodus 1:15-19). Later, when King Saul ordered his guards to kill the Jewish Priests in the city of Nov, they refused (Samuel I 22:16-17). When the prophet Daniel was forbidden to pray, he ignored the order and prayed anyway, which is why he was thrown into the lion's den (Daniel 6:7-14). Unlike the first two cases, however, Daniel's action differs in two respects. The midwives and guards refused to actively do an immoral action, and thus did nothing, while Daniel took a positive action in defiance. In addition, Pharaoh and Saul asked others to do an inhumane act between man and man, while Daniel's "prohibition" was an action between man and God. Since all three cases are brought without any apparent distinction, we can surmise that from a Jewish perspective, it makes no difference if the sin is active or passive or whether the sin is man to God or man to man.

The Torah itself anticipates civil disobedience on a certain level. When forming an army, the Torah allows certain categories of soldiers not to join (Deuteronomy 5:8). One of the categories of the soldier who is asked to return home and not fight is the soldier who is "weak of heart." The Mishna (Sotah 8:5-6), according to one opinion, explains this to be a person who does not feel he can fight, unable to stand in the heat of battle and cannot stand to see a drawn sword. Some commentaries have interpreted this not to signify people who are physically weak, but, rather, those who cannot fight because they are morally opposed to fighting in battle, what we would call today conscientious objectors. The Torah, anticipating this group of people, gave them the option not to fight and to be sent home without penalty, according to these commentaries. Therefore, the Torah does recognize the right (in potential) to object to military force.

The is a general problem that once people decide to act against the government for what they believe are moral reasons, who is to determine what legitimate disobedience is and what is illegitimate? Everybody always thinks their cause is moral. How, then, should we determine when civil disobedience is called for and when it is not? It is difficult to arrive at an accurate definition when civil disobedience is or is not legitimate in Judaism. However, in one area, there is a clear mandate to disobey, whether it be a Jewish or non-Jewish government: violating any aspect of the Torah. Maimonides says (Hilchot Melachim 3:9) that if the king asks a person to violate a Torah law, even a simple Mitzvah, one may violate the king's decree. The logic is the same as used when a parent asks a child to violate any part of the Torah: if the teacher (God) asks you to do something and the student (parent, police, or king) asks you to do the opposite, to whom should you listen? Obviously God's laws take precedence over any human king.

In areas where there is no clear guideline, it is not clear when to disobey the government. There is a concept of *Dina Demalchuta Dina*, that in areas that the Torah does not discuss, the law of the non-Jewish government becomes obligatory as a Jewish law as well. But if a Torah law is violated by observing a government law, this concept obviously does not apply, and a Jew is obligated to "protest" by not keeping this law. Thus, any time a Torah law is violated, a Jew must disobey the government and not keep that law.

Consequences of Disobedience - Although the cause is noble and the proper action to take, often the consequence of the action of civil disobedience, both in modern times and certainly in earlier times, is incarceration, or even possible death. That is the price one pays for this form of protest. And that is what makes civil disobedience so noble, is that people are

attempting to act within the law to protest a government policy or law. The acceptance of punishment without resisting adds to the moral legitimacy of the act. The noble attitude to the consequences of one's actions can be seen in the commentaries to the first instance of disobedience in the Torah.

The midwives did not kill the male Jewish babies, and when asked by Pharaoh why they disobeyed him, they offered the excuse that Jewish mothers were different in that they did not need midwives to give birth (Kiddushin 42b). It is not clear from the text whether Pharaoh believed this poor excuse. What then happened because of this protest? Pharaoh ordered all Jewish male infants to be killed by being thrown into the Nile. Therefore, their protest had no tangible results since ultimately Jewish babies were being killed anyway. We can learn from this example two lessons from this first recorded civil disobedience in recorded history. Firstly, that civil disobedience does not necessarily achieve the desired results. Yet, that does not signify that people should not attempt the protest anyway, as the Torah obviously lauds the midwives' actions as something noble and correct, not wasted. We also can learn that even when we are convinced that nothing will be accomplished, it is important to ensure that the immorality does not take place through your hand, if you know it to be wrong (do you listen to the teacher or student?)

What happened to these midwives? The Torah in our Parsha merely records that "because the midwives feared God, he made for them houses" (Exodus 1:21). It is not entirely clear what the houses were and who the "he" is. There are two explanations. The popular notion, recorded by Rashi, is that the "he" is God and that He did not make for them physical houses but the House of all Priests for Yocheved (who was Moses' and Aaron's mother, one of the midwives according to this tradition) and the house of Royalty for the other midwife (who traditionally is Miriam, who married Chur from the tribe of Judah and ancestor of Kind David). (Rashi on the verse and based on Sotah 11b). Rashbam does not accept this allegorical explanation. He says that the houses were real houses, jailhouses, built for the midwives and the pronoun "he" refers to Pharaoh.

Nechama Leibowitz taught, that on a conceptual level, Rashi and Rashbam are arguing about how the Torah views the fate of those who protest in the form of civil disobedience. Rashi could not imagine that the Torah is saying to all generations of Jews and Torah readers that the result of standing up for what you believe in, for what is right and for upholding Judaism, is to be put in jail. The Torah, rather, describes the reward that the midwives received to show that all is not in vain and that civil disobedience results in reward, a substantial reward, even if it is in the future. Rashbam, who lived in times of greater persecution than his grandfather, accepted the Torah's reaction to civil disobedience as one of reality. All is not rosy when you stand up against an immoral government. You should and must do the right thing. But one must be prepared for the harsh consequences which follow. That is part of life and part of being Jewish.

Where does the truth lie? As is said many times when there are two diverse opinions in Judaism, "these and those are part of the living world of God (Eiruvin 13b). In this case, both explanations truly do not contradict each other. It is possible that both Rashbam and Rashi are correct. Indeed, Pharaoh may have incarcerated the midwives and they may have suffered terribly. On the other hand, God may have indeed also rewarded their heroism with the houses of the Priesthood and of Royalty. And this may ultimately be the Jewish view of how we look at protestors of government immorality. Their short-term fate may indeed be harsh. They may not even accomplish any tangible change in the policies of an immoral government, as was the case with the midwives. But God does reward these people with rewards that will outlive the individuals and with rewards which far outweigh any suffering.

***This column has been adapted from a series of volumes written by Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel "*The Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*" available from Urim and Amazon. For the full article or to review all the footnotes in the original, contact the author at nachum@jewishdestiny.com**

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Creation of a People

Rabbi David Fine

At the beginning of a new book of the Torah it is appropriate to ask the question: what is the purpose and main message of this book? If one looks at the introductions to the book of Shemot of both the Ramban and the Netziv of Volozhin one detects different emphases and answers to our question. However, ultimately the identical message springs forth from both of these commentators despite their differences.

The Netziv quotes the Behag who titles the book of Shemot- "Chumash Hasheni (the second Chumash)". This indicates that the book of Shemot is a continuation of the book of Breishit. The book of Breishit is the book of creation – the creation of the physical world. The book of Shemot is about the spiritual creation of the world which is a result of the formation as a people of the people of Israel which occurs upon the exodus from Egypt and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. The message here is clear: the purpose of the world is not simply the physical but rather the spiritual. The spiritual world is most influenced by the people of Israel who, as a "light unto the nations," will bring the entire world to a recognition of the one God. This could be why the book of Shemot begins with a listing of the names of the children of Jacob and the fact that they came to Egypt even though these facts are already known to us from the end of Breishit. The Torah wants to stress that, what at the beginning of the Book is a collection of individuals, is transformed into a nation by its middle.

The Ramban maintains that the book of Shemot is indeed its own sefer and not only a continuation of Breishit. He titles the Book – Sefer HaGeulah- the book of redemption. While one may think that redemption occurs upon the physical release of the people from Egypt or even upon the giving of the Torah, the Ramban maintains that the redemption only occurs at the end of the Book, upon the building of the Mishkan and its being filled with the glory of God. When God's glory inhabits the Mishkan, then the people are "returned to the level of their forefathers." The Ramban's ultimate message is clear and is essentially not so different from that of the Netziv: redemption is not dependent on the physical, even the creation of the Jewish people. Redemption only can occur when the people interact and engage with God's glory and thus strive to be on the level of their forefathers.

These are critical messages for the world we live in which often, in a very artificial way, suffices itself with the physical. There are many manifestations of this but the example which I would like to discuss is the Land of Israel. We, in the religious Zionist community, have focused for so long, rightfully so, on the physical settling of the land of Israel. However, we have not equally been concerned for the kind of society that has been built in the land. The society is often focused on externals instead of upon propagating true Jewish values. Only when we focus on bringing the Glory of God into the world will be living up to our true calling as a nation. We are a nation like none other. This is what the book of Shemot comes to tell us.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

The Big Picture

Moshe asks of Hashem, "behold, I come to the people of Israel, and I will tell them that the G-d of their forefathers sent me to them; and they will ask me, 'What is His name?', how shall I respond? (Shemos 3:13)

This question is highly perplexing. If the words "G-d of your forefathers" is at all meaningful to them, then surely they know His "name"? And is this really the important question they would pose? Wouldn't they focus on trying to get some real evidence that Moshe is genuine and capable of redeeming them, rather than simply finding out His name?

Not only is the request vexing, but the answer is perplexing as well. The name "Eh-keh" is indeed one of the sheimos of Hashem, and yet it appears nowhere else in Tanach besides here. Elsewhere in Tanach the word is used connoting its literal meaning, not as a name of Hashem.

Let us start by understanding the mindset of people before the great events of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Sinai. The idea of a "Great and Mighty Power" was almost universal. Everyone in the world believed in forces that were very powerful, and the question was simply who or what is that force? Every nation had its idols that were considered the "power that be" until another nation bested them, and then the idols of the conquering nations were seen as being the all-powerful forces, and so on. All in all, that is a very logical approach. Just as the nation that wins the battle is seen as being the stronger nation, so too their god is seen as being the stronger god.

The Jewish nation had been enslaved for two centuries, suffering in a most excruciating way. They were slaves, working under torturous conditions, with all sorts of attempts being made to totally eradicate them. Where was the God of their fathers? The only "logical" conclusion was that either He had been bested by the Egyptian gods, or that He was insensitive to Israel's suffering. In either case, He no longer was a viable candidate for being Israel's redeemer, and thus Moshe Rabbeinu's powerful question: how does he explain this to the Jewish People?

Hashem replied that in order to understand the God that is ready to redeem them, they must first relearn what G-d is all about. Their "Elokim" model pictured Hashem as a more-powerful, or even all-powerful, entity, but one for whom, any period of "inactivity" would indicate a shortcoming. If the all-powerful is inactive, he either can't or won't act.

But the real essence of Hashem, is "Y-H-W-H", which means "Was, Is, and Will Be." Hashem transcends time, and to begin to understand Hashem one must be able see the entire picture over a long span of time. Just as a two-dimensional picture (e.g. an X-ray) cannot do justice to a three dimensional object, and just as a single image cannot do justice to an entire movie, so too, man's chronologically segmented grasp of events doesn't properly appreciate and capture Hashem's Providence. If anything one sees a distortion. A farmer who plants a seed, watches it disintegrate, and sees nothing happen all winter, could be mighty disappointed if he lacks the knowledge and foresight to know what will happen in the spring. It is only when we can see all the events in a long sequence that we understand. It is the past, present, and future combined that may yield a more complete understanding of Hashem's hashgacha.

Hashem therefore told Moshe, "Klal Yisroel has knowledge of the past, i.e. the God of their forefathers. They must add the "Eh-keh", i.e. the understanding of the future. Only when they will be able to see the entire continuum in one fell swoop, will they be able to perceive Hashem's providence and benevolence which is to be found even in the present!

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

The Anatomy of an Exile

Now Yosef died, as well as all his brothers and all that generation. The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very-very strong, and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know about Yosef. (Shemos 1:6-8)

A new king arose: [There is a controversy between] Rav and Samuel. One says: He was really new, and the other one says: His decrees were new. – Rashi

The Torah is not a history book! That doesn't mean that there isn't history in the Torah. It's just not information that has been recorded for intellectual intrigue alone. Everything is scribed for a profoundly relevant lesson. We are treated to a narrative about the descent of the Jewish People into the Exile of Egypt to notice a classic pattern to discern the key features of an exile, so we can better understand our own circumstances, and survive.

This is how it all began. Yosef and all his brothers and that whole generation died, and the children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied to an extraordinary extent. Let's put these two factors together. That means that an entirely new generation was growing up without a vision of the stature of the Tzadikim and Gedolim of the previous generation, and there was no one Mashgiach, trained observer. Too often the behavior changes depending upon who's watching. Next, the Torah reports that the land became filled with them. What does that mean? By design, Yosef had set up his family that they should settle apart from the rest of Egyptian society in Goshen. It was the first Jewish ghetto, but it was purposefully arranged that way to isolate and insulate the Holy Children of Israel from the ills and evils of Egyptian life.

Now this is the beginning of all exiles. This is how it works! The Jewish Nation may be even sitting in the Land of Israel with a Temple and suddenly the allure of Babylonian culture captures the imagination of the many.

People begin to fantasize that those idols are better and easier and more effective than what we have in an invisible G-d. They can do whatever they want, and go wherever they wish without restriction. There is no need to feel guilty anymore. Maybe we can unbridle ourselves and be free and live like those highly cultured and sophisticated Babylonians.

What does HASHEM do!? Like a good father he does what a friend of mine's father did. He told me that his father smelled smoke in the basement. He questioned him whether or not he was the one that was smoking. He admitted to his father that it was him. The father did not give him a lecture about the ills and costs of smoking. He did something wonderfully wicked. He told his son, "You like smoking!? Let's smoke!" He took him to a store and bought a carton and he sat him down in the basement and had him light cigarette after cigarette for hours on end until his face was green and he was coughing and vomiting. After that encounter, he never wanted to look at a cigarette again.

So too HASHEM says, "You like the Babylonian or Egyptian lifestyle?! You think it's noble!? I'll give you a giant dose of their "nobility". So it was in Egypt, Babylonia, Greece, Spain, and Germany, you name it! By the bitter end we found ourselves nauseated by their grotesque hypocrisy and cruelty, and we were happy to have survived to rejoin the normalcy of a life of Torah and Mitzvos.

The generation that followed the demise of Yosef and his brothers gradually became enchanted by Egyptian culture and were seduced by their ways. They forfeited their power of renewal, the Koach of Chiddush, to alien and external forces. The idea and the ideal became to be more like them. Now they are vulnerable to being controlled by a New King with new ideas and laws.

The beginning of the redemption is HaChodesh HaZeh Lachem – This Month, – newness is to you! Take back your time and reclaim your life. Such is the anatomy of an exile.

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from: Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein <ravadlerstein@torah.org> to: targumim@torah.org date: Dec 23, 2021, 12:37 PM subject: Reb Yeruchem - Too Much Information

Reb Yeruchem Levovitz Zt"l
By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Parshas Shemos Too Much Information print

Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them, "…I have surely remembered you, and what is being done to you in Egypt."[2]

Welcome news, to be sure. But perhaps a bit dramatic, and more than a bit premature? Given the state of mind of the people, why did this message come now, while the nation was still in the full grip of the shibud, before Moshe could provide any indication at all that anything had changed?

You could argue, with justification, that a show of emunah by the Bnei Yisrael was a necessary precursor to the geulah. (Chazal[3] point specifically to the verses, "And they will hearken to your voice,"[4] and "The people believed"[5] as important contributions towards their redemption.) Yet, that confidence in Hashem could have awaited the beginning of the long process of the makos. Why was it necessary to tell them about a geulah that was still many months away?

Here is the explanation. The Torah makes it quite clear that the exodus from Egypt played an outsize role in forging the emunah of our people. This is the reason why Hashem began the Aseres HaDibros with a reference to His redeeming us from slavery. It is the reason why remembering yetzias Mitzrayim returns again and again as an explicit element in so many of the mitzvos of the Torah. It is the reason why so many miracles and signs attended the redemption.

It is also a truism that Hashem does not grant anything to us without some kind of preparatory action on our part. To ready ourselves for an infusion of emunah, we had to act on its imminent arrival. It was necessary for us to hear about Hashem's pending intervention on our behalf, and for us to anticipate it, dwell on it, savor it in advance. The Yalkut mentioned above does not mean that we had to accept the news rather than scoff at it. It means that we had to delight in that news. We had to picture different scenarios of redemption in our minds in advance of any display on Hashem's part. We had to believe with intensity before we had anything to show for it.

We mean the same in our tefilah during the Yamim Noraim regarding the rest of the world. We request of Hashem, "Place your fear…upon all Your beings." We continue with, "And all Your creatures will come to fear you." It is easy to read the second phrase as a consequence of the first, but it would be an error. Rather, the tefilah is that all humans will begin to feel a sense of awe and reverence for Hashem. If, and only if, that occurs, we can pray for the former phrase as well. As a consequence of the openness of humans to the fear of Hashem, he can place a fuller, more sophisticated sense of fear upon them.

We showed that first, loving, anticipatory emunah in His promise to us back in Mitzrayim, before the miracles occurred. And that is what led to the greatest display of Hashem and His abilities in the history of Man.

1 Based on Daas Torah of R. Yeruchem Levovitz, Shemos, pgs. 18-20 ↑ 2 Shemos 3:16 ↑ 3 Yalkut Shimoni, Hoshea 519 ↑ 4 Shemos 3:18 ↑ 5 Shemos 4:31 ↑

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On Not Obeying Immoral Orders
Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l

The opening chapters of Exodus plunge us into the midst of epic events. Almost at a stroke the Israelites are transformed from protected minority to slaves. Moses passes from prince of Egypt to Midianite shepherd to leader of the Israelites through a history-changing encounter at the Burning Bush. Yet it is one small, often overlooked episode that deserves to be seen as a turning-point in the history of humanity. Its heroines are two remarkable women, Shifra and Puah.

We do not know who they were. The Torah gives us no further information about them other than that they were midwives, instructed by Pharaoh: 'When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live' (Ex. 1:16). The Hebrew description of the two women as hameyaldot ha'ivriyot is ambiguous. It could mean "the Hebrew midwives"; so most translations and commentaries read it. But it could equally mean, "the midwives to the Hebrews," in which case they may have been Egyptian. That is how Josephus,[1] Abarbanel and Samuel David Luzzatto understand it, arguing that it is simply implausible to suppose that Hebrew women would have been party to an act of genocide against their own people.

What we do know, however, is that they refused to carry out the order: "The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the King of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17).

This is the first recorded instance in history of civil disobedience: refusing to obey an order, given by the most powerful man in the most powerful empire of the ancient world, simply because it was immoral, unethical, inhuman.

The Torah suggests that they did so without fuss or drama. Summoned by Pharaoh to explain their behaviour, they simply replied: "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive" (Ex. 1:19). To this, Pharaoh had no reply. The matter-of-factness of the entire incident reminds us of one of the most salient findings about the courage of those who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. They had little in common except for the fact that they saw nothing remarkable in what they did.[2] Often the mark of real moral heroes is that they do not see themselves as moral heroes. They do what they do because that is what a human being is supposed to do. That is probably the meaning

of the statement that they “feared God.” It is the Torah’s generic description of those who have a moral sense.[3]

It took more than three thousand years for what the midwives did to become enshrined in international law. In 1946, the Nazi war criminals on trial at Nuremberg all offered the defence that they were merely obeying orders, given by a duly constituted and democratically elected government. Under the doctrine of national sovereignty every government has the right to issue its own laws and order its own affairs. It took a new legal concept, namely a ‘crime against humanity’, to establish the guilt of the architects and administrators of genocide.

The Nuremberg principle gave legal substance to what the midwives instinctively understood: that there are some orders that should not be obeyed, because they are immoral. Moral law transcends and may override the law of the state. As the Talmud puts it:

“If there is a conflict between the words of the Master [God] and the words of a disciple [a human being], the words of the Master must prevail” (Kiddushin 42b).

The Nuremberg trials were not the first occasion on which the story of the midwives had a significant impact on history. Throughout the Middle Ages the Church, knowing that knowledge is power and therefore preferring to keep it exclusively in the hands of the priesthood, had forbidden vernacular translations of the Bible. In the course of the sixteenth century, three developments changed this irrevocably. First was the Reformation, with its maxim Sola scriptura, “By Scripture alone,” placing the Bible centre-stage in the religious life.

Second was the invention, in the mid-fifteenth century, of printing. Lutherans were convinced that this was Divine Providence. God had sent the printing press so that the doctrines of the Reformed church could be spread worldwide.

Third was the fact that some people, regardless of the ban, had translated the Bible anyway. John Wycliffe and his followers had done so in the fourteenth century, but the most influential rebel was William Tyndale whose translation of the New Testament, begun in 1525, became the first printed Bible in English. He paid for this with his life.

When Queen Mary I took the Church of England back to Catholicism, many English Protestants fled to Calvin’s Geneva, where they produced a new translation, based on Tyndale, called the Geneva Bible. Produced in a small, affordable edition, it was smuggled into England in large numbers. Able to read the Bible by themselves for the first time, people soon discovered that it was, as far as monarchy is concerned, a highly seditious document.

It tells of how God told Samuel that in seeking to appoint a King, the Israelites were rejecting Him as their only Sovereign. It describes graphically how the Prophets were unafraid to challenge Kings, which they did with the authority of God Himself. And it told the story of the midwives who refused to carry out Pharaoh’s order. On this, in a marginal note, the Geneva Bible endorses their refusal, criticising only the fact that, in explaining their behaviour, they told a lie. The note says, “Their disobedience herein was lawful, but their dissembling evil.”

King James understood clearly the dire implication of that one sentence. It meant that a King could be disobeyed on the authority of God Himself: a clear and categorical refutation of the idea of the Divine right of Kings.[4] Eventually, unable to stop the spread of Bibles in translation, King James decided to commission his own version which appeared in 1611. But by then the damage had been done and the seeds of what became the English revolution had been planted. Throughout the seventeenth century, by far the most influential force in English politics was the Hebrew Bible as understood by the Puritans, and it was the Pilgrim Fathers who took this faith with them on their journey to what would eventually become the United States of America.

A century and a half later, it was the work of another English radical, Thomas Paine, that made a decisive impact on the American revolution. His pamphlet, Common Sense, was published in America in January 1776 and became an instant best seller, selling 100,000 copies almost immediately. Its impact was huge, and because of it he became known as “the father of the American Revolution.” Despite the fact that Paine was an atheist, the opening pages of Common Sense, justifying rebellion against a tyrannical King, are entirely based on citations from the Hebrew Bible. In the same spirit, that summer Benjamin Franklin drew, as his design for the Great Seal of America, a picture of the Egyptians (i.e. the English) drowning in the Red Sea (i.e. the Atlantic), with the caption, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.” Thomas Jefferson was so struck by the sentence that he recommended it to be used on the Great Seal of Virginia, and later incorporated it in his personal seal.

The story of the midwives belongs to a larger vision implicit throughout the Torah and Tanach as a whole: that right is sovereign over might, and that even God Himself can be called to account in the name of justice, as He expressly mandates Abraham to do. Sovereignty ultimately belongs to God, so any human act or order that transgresses the will of God is by that fact alone ultra vires. These revolutionary ideas are intrinsic to the biblical vision of politics and the use of power.

In the end, though, it was the courage of two remarkable women that created the precedent later taken up by the American writer Thoreau[5] in his classic essay Civil Disobedience (1849) that in turn inspired Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in the twentieth century. Their story also ends with a lovely touch. The text says:

“So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them houses” (Ex. 1:20-21).

Luzzatto interpreted this last phrase to mean that He gave them families of their own. Often, he wrote, midwives are women who are unable to have children. In this case, God blessed Shifra and Puah by giving them children, as he had done for Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel.

This too is a not unimportant point. The closest Greek literature comes to the idea of civil disobedience is the story of Antigone who insisted on giving her brother Polynices a burial despite the fact that King Creon had refused to permit it, regarding him as a traitor to Thebes. Sophocles’ Antigone is a tragedy: the heroine must die because of her loyalty to her brother and her disobedience to the King. By contrast, the Hebrew Bible is not a tragedy. In fact biblical Hebrew has no word meaning “tragedy” in the Greek sense. Good is rewarded, not punished, because the universe, God’s work of art, is a world in which moral behaviour is blessed and evil, briefly in the ascendant, is ultimately defeated.

Shifra and Puah are two of the great heroines of world literature, the first to teach humanity the moral limits of power.

[1] Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, II.9.2.

[2] See James Q. Wilson, The Moral Sense, New York, Free Press, 1993, pp. 35-39, and the literature cited there.

[3] See, for example, Gen. 20:11.

[4] See Christopher Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution, London: Allen Lane, 1993.

[5] See Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience, Boston: David R. Godine, 1969, first published in 1849.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Dec 23, 2021, 11:43 AM subject: Rav Frand - Presenting the Names of an All-Star Lineup!

Parshas Shemos Presenting the Names of an All-Star Lineup

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion:

#1188 – Cho'shaid Be'keshayrim – Not Giving The Benefit of the Doubt. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in the beginning of Sefer Shemos says: "And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each man came with his household." (Shemos 1:1) The Torah then proceeds to again list the names of the Shevatim. Rashi comments: "Even though we already heard the names of the twelve Tribes during their lifetime, the Torah repeats and lists them again after their death – to show us how dear they are to the Ribono shel Olam, for they are compared to the stars who are brought out and brought back in by count and by name, as it is written: 'He brings forth their legions by number, He calls to each of them by name.'" (Yeshaya 40:26)

This is incredible. There are billions of stars and they all seem the same to us. But to the Ribono shel Olam, each one is dear and special. When something is dear and special, you call it by its name. Similarly, Rashi here says that Klal Yisrael are like the Kochavim – they too are dear to the Almighty, and therefore he calls each of them by name.

I saw a comment from Rav Leib Bakst, z"l, (1915-2003). Why are the Kochavim so dear to the Almighty? Rav Bakst points out that the reason the Kochavim were created in the first place was to mollify the moon. The famous Rashi in Parshas Bereshis relates that originally the Ribono shel Olam created the sun and the moon to be of equal size, each with an independent source of light. The moon came to the Almighty with the complaint that "Two kings cannot share the same crown." The Almighty agreed with this argument and commanded the moon to reduce its size and forgo its independent power of illumination. Chazal say that to appease the feelings of the moon for this downgrade in stature, the Ribono shel Olam created all the stars in the universe to accompany the moon at night, and to make the moon feel better.

Rav Leib Bakst says "Something or someone that makes another person or thing feel better is dear to the Ribono shel Olam. The Almighty loves sensitivity and loves entities that make others feel better. That is why Klal Yisrael is comparable to the stars – because they also make people feel better."

I once heard al pi derush (homiletically) at an Ufroof: The Ramoh writes (Shulchan Aruch Even Ezer Siman 61) "There are those who suggest making the chuppah under the sky." There is a minhag Yisrael that people should get married under the sky. That is why chuppahs are typically held outdoors or under the skylight of a building. The Ramoh adds that this is a fortuitous sign (Siman Tov) that their seed will be like the stars in Heaven.

The popular understanding of this Ramoh is that the symbolism of holding the chuppah under the stars is that it should be a segulah for having many children ("as numerous as the stars in Heaven"). This, no doubt, is the simple pshat of the Ramoh in Shulchan Aruch. But I once heard al pi derush that the symbolism is something else: Your children should be "like the stars" means your children should be the type of people who are sensitive to others and that go out of their way to appease others and make them feel better – as was the original purpose of the stars in Heaven, to make the moon feel better.

Consolation for Miscarriages and the Loss of Infants

The pasuk says, "And a man went from the House of Levi and he married the daughter of Levi." (Shemos 2:1) The Gemara says (Sotah 12) that after Pharaoh made the decree that every male Jewish child should be thrown into the Nile, Amram, who was the Gadol haDor, divorced his wife. He said "We toil in vain." He felt, under these circumstances why would we want to bring more children into the world.

The Gemara relates that Amram's daughter Miriam came to him and told him that his decree was more severe than that of Pharaoh. Pharaoh only decreed death to the males. Amram's decree effectively stopped even females from being born. Furthermore, she told her father, Pharaoh's decree only took effect in Olam HaZeh (This World), whereas Amram's decree that no child be born was a decree that impacted not only Olam HaZeh, but also Olam HaBah (The World to Come). (Rashi explains: Since the child would not be born, his soul would never come into the Next World.)

There is a machlokes in Masechta Sanhedrin (110b) as to how old a child needs to be before being eligible to enter Olam HaBah. Rav Chiya and Rav Shimon bar Rebbi argue as to whether it is from the moment of birth or from the moment the child learns to speak. However, the Gemara there has a third opinion – Ravina says it is from the moment of conception. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in a Teshuva in Yoreh De'ah (III:138) that we pasken like Ravina.

Lo Aleinu, sometimes women miscarry and the child they are pregnant with never comes into this world. It is a very emotional and tragic situation when a woman carries a baby for several months and the pregnancy does not come to fruition. People need to realize, however, that it is not "totally for naught that we struggle." As soon as the child was conceived, the neshama can go to Olam HaBah. Certainly, if the child is born, even if it does not live long, the child can go to Olam HaBah. This was part of Miriam's complaint against her father: Pharaoh only decreed death for Jewish children in this world; your decree dooms them from having a chance to enter Olam HaBah.

This is a consolation for people who sometimes find themselves in such an unfortunate situation. They should know that it is not for naught they have toiled.

I want to share an incredible incident that happened with the Gaon of Vilna (GR"A). The GR"A had a disciple who was childless for the first twenty years of his marriage. Finally, they had a baby, but shortly after the baby was born, the baby died. The Gaon came to the couple to be menachem avel. Only the Gaon could say what he said. He told the couple that the neshama of their deceased child belonged to a very famous figure in Jewish history known as the Graf Pototsky (c. 1700 – May 23, 1749).

The Graf Pototsky was a Polish nobleman who converted to Judaism. He was a Ger Tzedek. The Government told him that if he refused to renounce his Judaism, he would be burned at the stake. On Shavuos 5509, he was burned at the stake in the middle of the Vilna town square. He was a nobleman who could have had a life of luxury, yet he died Al Kiddush HaShem! He converted and not only did he give up everything but he died a martyr's death!

The Gaon told the couple that the neshama of the Graf Pototsky was a perfect neshama – except there was only one thing he was lacking: He was not born Jewish. He was born as a goy and he converted. In order for his neshama to achieve perfection, he had to be born of a Jewish mother. That is what happened with this woman's pregnancy and delivery. After that mission was accomplished, the neshama could leave this world and return to the Olam HaEmes completely perfected.

We don't know the calculations of the Almighty, but sometimes a neshama needs to come into this world albeit briefly, and sometimes it does not even make it into this world. But even such a neshama can be zoche to Olam HaBah (merit the World to Come).

Be Careful What You Daven For

"His sister stood at a distance to learn what would happen to him." (Shemos 2:6).

Moshe's parents hid their son for three months. After three months, they could not hide him any longer. They put him in a basket and sent him floating down the river. Miriam, his sister, stood at the river bank to see what was going to be with her baby brother.

Who should come down to bathe in the river? It is none other than Pharaoh's daughter! Pharaoh was the perpetrator of the decree "All male children shall be thrown into the Nile" and his daughter comes down to bathe at that moment! Miriam must have been praying to the Almighty at that moment "Please, Hashem, don't let her see the baby!" Miriam must have been thinking that Pharaoh's daughter would certainly want to enforce her father's decree.

What happened? It was just the opposite of Miriam's worst fears. Pharaoh's daughter does see the baby. She takes him into the palace with her and raises him in the house of Pharaoh. He becomes the savior of Israel. The lesson of this story is: Be careful of what you daven for. A person never really knows what is good. Miriam thinks it would be the worst thing in the world for

Pharaoh's daughter to spot her brother. In the end, that turned out to be his salvation and the salvation of Klal Yisrael.

This is a classic example of the popular Yiddish saying, "A mensch tracht un G-t lacht" (a person thinks and G-d laughs). We see this in all areas of life. I often see situations where a bochur is going out with a girl and he wants the shidduch to happen. He prays to the Ribono shel Olam "Please Hashem, make this shidduch happen! Please Hashem, make this shidduch happen!" It doesn't happen. The bochur is devastated. Oy vey is mir! (Woe is me!) Eventually, he marries someone else. Twenty years later, he sees what happened with that girl and what happened with the woman he married. He says, "You know G-d, You know what you are doing!"

The same thing happens in business. Sometimes a person has an opportunity in business and he thinks to himself "Oh! This is going to put me on Easy Street. This is how I am going to make my fortune!" At the last minute, the deal falls through and he thinks "Oh no! Woe is me! What does the Ribono shel Olam have against me?" Then, three years later, he reads that his potential partner is indicted for criminal activity, and he had been a complete crook. The person who felt that G-d somehow had it against him, now realizes that he would have been in the same situation as the fellow in jail.

This is the lesson of "His sister stood off at a distance." We need to leave solutions up to the Ribono shel Olam. "That which is good in Your Eyes – do!" You know what is best. Hatov b'Einecha Aseh!

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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

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Meshech Hochmah on the Torah

by R. Gidon Rothstein

Meshech Hochmah has a long introduction to the book of Shemot. To be sure we also had time for some of the actual parashah, I have taken only parts of the introduction, but much of it was too good to pass up.

Moshe's Special Role in Setting Up Torah

He makes a point the Torah itself made and Rambam (among others, such as Ran in his Derashot) emphasized, Moshe's prophecy was proven true and eternal in a way qualitatively superior to all other prophets. Meshech Hochmah thinks all other prophets established their status either with miracles or by certification from an already-accepted prophet, such as Eliyahu telling the Jewish people Elisha would be prophet after him ,

Problem is, neither of those paths prove the truth of a prophet indubitably. Meshech Hochmah suggests such prophets are more like how courts believe two unimpeached witnesses; we are required to believe them, and probably most often they are telling the truth, but there easily could be exceptions. In particular, he notes tradition's view of Hananiah b. Azur (a prophet of Yirmiyahu's time, see Yirmiyahu 28), originally a true prophet, who later switched to making false claims as if they were prophecies.

Second, if miracles are the reason we believe a prophet, if someone later finds ways to do more impressive miracles that person could uproot the original prophecy. To ensure that would not happen with Moshe, Gd raised the entire Jewish people to the level of prophecy, so they could themselves directly witness/experience Gd's speaking to Moshe panim el panim, face to face (as it were), and be sure this would not ever be replicated or replace. The knowledge and experience justifies rejecting any prophet who tries to reverse or change the Torah, allows us to be sure that prophet is false and to be put to death.

It is why Shemot 19;9 will say Gd is going to appear to Moshe in front of the people so they will believe in Moshe forever. Because we ourselves (as the continuations of our forefathers who stood at Sinai) experienced this, we know no other prophet can ever reach that level. (As a fascinating aside, he says Rambam dealt with these topics well in Yesodei ha-Torah 7 and 8, says all his words there are sanctified, and were without doubt said in a spirit of prophecy. Worth a whole discussion of its own.)

Free Will, Its Importance, and Moshe's Lack of It

He struggles with Gd's having placed such confidence in Moshe, because what if Moshe went wrong after that, said things that were not what Gd had wanted, even, Gd forbid, inserted them into the Torah? His simple answer is that Gd removed Moshe's freewill; from that point on, Moshe was not fully his own person

He is not fully comfortable with the idea, because freewill (this too goes back at least to Rambam) is what makes people human, worthy servants of Gd. Angels have no freewill, always do what's right, yet Gd wants humans to serve. More, the human soul did no wrong before being placed in a body, yet Gd decided to place it in a body, because Gd valued the lifelong struggle to overcome our baser instincts, to rise to higher and higher levels. Why would Moshe be denied this path?

Instead, he says Moshe had worked on himself well enough to reach a level where almost all his freewill was gone anyway, and that's the human goal. He has pulled a switch, now lets us know overcoming freewill is a first stage, the ultimate goal is to reach a point where one is no longer even tempted, where there is no need to overcome oneself.

We might think Gd wants people to live human lives, encounter and overcome temptation in the name of serving Gd. That is not wrong, only incomplete. The more accurate expression of Meshech Hochmah's view sees the goal of service as being to ingrain it so fully it becomes literally nature, so we're no longer even tempted (this, too, goes back at least to Rambam in his Introduction to Avot.)

Surprising steps one and two: Moshe's prophecy has been firmly established by the entire Jewish people having been brought to enough of a level of prophecy to witness Gd's "face to face" interactions with Moshe, to therefore know, more certainly than any other prophet after, that Moshe's prophecy was true and would not be changed.

For Moshe to be the bearer of such prophecy, Gd had to be able to trust he would never go wrong, and did so by withdrawing his freewill, Moshe having already almost reached the height of human growth, where his freewill was no longer relevant anyway.

Yehoshu'a Also Shed His Freewill

All well and good, except tradition (he cites Makkot 11a) suggested Yehoshu'a too was empowered to include certain passages in the Torah, the last verses of the Torah or the parts about the cities of refuge.

Nedarim 22b also implies Yehoshu'a's prophecy was of a different type than other prophets, because it says that had the Jewish people not sinned, they would have been given only the Torah itself and the book of Yehoshu'a, suggesting there was something essential about his prophecy as well If so, Meshech Hochmah assumes, Gd must have taken away his freewill as well, because it was impossible to have a prophet with such power who also had meaningful freewill.

To prove it was true for Yehoshu'a, Meshech Hochmah offers two ideas. First, when the spies go to Israel, Rava in Sotah 34b said Moshe changed his disciple's name from Hoshe'a to Yehoshu'a as a prayer that Gd protect him from joining the other spies. (Meshech Hochmah is taking that to mean Gd will make it impossible for him, by withdrawing his freewill.)

In addition, Moshe tells the people he knows they will descend into idolatry after his death, Devarim 31;29, when they did not do so for all the time of Yehoshu'a. Midrashic tradition thought this showed a man's student counts as himself, that it was as if Moshe was still alive all of Yehoshu'a's life . If

Yehoshu'a is a continuation of Moshe, presumably he too had achieved the lack of freewill.

Stopping the Sun

Their spiritual level explains their ability to stop the sun, according to Meshech Hochmah. The sun serves Gd as do angels, where only Gd's Will matters, feel compelled to act as they understand Gd's Will .

While people reach greater heights than angels (or heavenly bodies), they only do so by overcoming their animalistic instincts. Those who do so successfully can command the sun or moon, because they are at a higher level of Gd's service, with the significant caveat there must be a guarantee they will not backslide. Iyov 15;15 says Gd does not trust even His most holy ones, as it were, because people are generally susceptible to failure even after long times of success.

Moshe and Yehoshu'a were different in their having reached a state where regression was impossible, because they had slain their freewill.

Quite an introduction, with themes I bet we will see again in the future. But let's make sure to see two comments on actual verses of this parsha.

Moshe's Father, Legislator

When Gd first speaks to Moshe, 3;6, Gd says He is the Gd of your father, of Avraham, of Yitzhak, and Ya'akov. Theoretically, the first phrase meant the Gd of your father Avraham, but Meshech Hochmah suggests it means Amram. In what way? He points to Laws of Kings 9;1, where Rambam lists how mitzvot came into the world, six to Adam, one more to Noah, one to each of the Avot and then says Gd commanded Amram in many mitzvot.

I've struggled with that comment, because it is not clear where Rambam got the idea. Meshech Hochmah suggests this could be one contributing text, that Gd counts as the Gd of Moshe's father because Amram had been commanded in mitzvot .

I primarily notice it because it's a Rambam I wonder about from time to time. In addition, though, it reminds us the process of bringing Gd's commandments into the world was more piecemeal than we might realize, one of those events being Amram's lifetime, when he preceded his son as a lawgiver to the Jewish people.

Coercion Helps Only Jews Do the Right Thing

Telling Moshe about the process it will take to get the Jews out of Egypt, Gd says He knows Par'oh will not let the Jews go, 3;19, ve-lo be-yad hazakah. Meshech Hochmah thinks it means Gd's mighty hand might eventually coerce Par'oh to release the Jews, but will never bring him to agree to release them.

This is in contrast to Jews, where tradition thinks (as Rambam famously phrased it in the second chapter of Laws of Divorce) a Jew who is forced to do the right thing, who seems to only be saying s/he wants to, really does want to, because the Jewish soul always wants to act properly, is sometimes waylaid by his/her baser instincts.

Not so with non-Jews like Par'oh, for whom coercion will eventually produce the needed outcome, but never the preferred change of heart in Par'oh himself.

Moshe and Yehoshu'a utilized their freewill to submit fully to Gd's Will, earning status as conduits for the Torah itself, because there was no worry they would regress. Moshe may have learned it from his father, whose being commanded in mitzvot linked him to Gd in ways similar to the Avot. And in ways Par'oh never managed to achieve, even coercion not enough to get him to reach internal change.

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from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Dec 23, 2021, 11:16 PM subject: Rabbi Wein - We Shouldn't Ignore this Lesson from Egypt

Rabbi Wein By Torah.org To Dedicate an Article click here

Parshas Shemos We Shouldn't Ignore this Lesson from Egypt print

Nothing human is ever permanent. Perhaps the only exception to this rule is human nature itself, which, seemingly, has never changed from the days of the Garden of Eden until today. So, we should not be surprised by the narrative of the Torah in this week's portion.

The Jewish people have been in Egypt for centuries. They have lived off the fat of the Land in Goshen. They were highly respected, apparently affluent, and thought themselves to be secure in their land of exile. The memory of their leader Joseph, who was the savior of Egypt, still lingered in their minds, and also in the minds of the general Egyptian public. But Joseph was gone already for centuries, and as the Jewish people multiplied and continued to succeed within the Egyptian population its government, through the Pharaoh, began to look askance at them. They were no longer fellow citizens or loyal subjects, but, rather, were now seen as a dangerous and insidious minority that, because of its birthright and success, could endanger Egyptian society.

There now arose a new era, different from the centuries that preceded it. When the Talmud teaches us that there arose a new Pharaoh, one of the opinions is that a new attitude towards the Jews, one of suspicion and jealousy was apparent. The Jews were now seen as being an internal enemy, a disloyal section of society, an existential threat to the pharaohs of Egypt specifically, and to Egyptian society generally.

The Midrash seems to indicate that the Jews were not sensitive enough to realize how dangerous the change of attitude towards them was, in the general Egyptian society. When Pharaoh requested volunteers to come forth to help him in his great building projects, we are taught that the Jews came en masse to help build those symbols of might and wealth of ancient Egypt. The Pharaoh then, and undoubtedly with the help and acquiescence of much of Egyptian society, removed from the Jews their voluntary status, until suddenly they found themselves slaves and servants of Egypt, and no longer merely sojourners in the country.

And there were Jews who were willing to cooperate with the governmental authorities in policing the Jewish slave society. Eventually, these Jews also found themselves to be the victims of the Pharaoh and his cruel decree. It is no wonder that so many Jews – according to various opinions of the rabbis of Talmud and Midrash – never were able to extricate themselves from Egypt, even when Moshe successfully led the Jewish people out of Egyptian bondage, and out of Egypt itself.

There is, undoubtedly, a pattern that the Torah introduces which will apply to all later exiles of the Jewish people throughout the world. The end of an era always occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, illogically, and shockingly. The story of the end European Jewry that occurred almost a century ago is a sobering reminder of this pattern of exile. Jews should be wise enough to realize that ignoring the lessons of history is a truly fatal course in life.

Shabbat shalom,

Rabbi Berel Wein

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Shemos - Growth Investment

It was a test for the ages. The mighty Pharaoh commanded the midwives Shifra and Puah, known to us as Yocheved and her daughter Miriam, to kill all the boys born to Hebrew mothers. Not only did they ignore the edict, they countered it by nourishing the newborns with pacifying words and comforting amenities food and drink.. The Midrash tells us that they cared for the sick and unhealthy babies as well, nourishing them with prayers, and Hashem in heaven did not ignore their actions.

But the verses need some explanation. First the Torah tells us, "And G-d rewarded the midwives, and the nation flourished and prospered." Only then does it add, "And it was as the midwives feared Hashem, and He made for them houses." Rashi explains that both midwives were rewarded for their

efforts with more than physical houses. They were rewarded with houses of Kohanim and kings. Hashem rewarded them well with generations of kings and priests, Divine attributes that are perpetuated through the species of humans that the midwives actually saved male Jewish children! A kohain can only be the son of a Kohain, and a King can only be a male!

But there seems to be an interruption in the order of the verses. The words "and the nation flourished" seem out of context. In fact, Rashi is bothered by the obvious question and explains the verses as follows. "And G-d rewarded the midwives," and what was the reward? "He made for them houses." The words "and the nation flourished" are part of the narrative, an historical footnote inserted into the middle of the episode of heroism and reward. But the simple, juxtaposed text needs clarification.

Perhaps there is a way to explain the historical insert

More than 10 years ago, my brother, Reb Zvi and his wife had a beautiful little baby boy. He was truly beautiful. And he was truly little. Five weeks premature and only two-and-a-half pounds.

For a while it was touch and go. The prayers of a community and thousands of friends and relatives pulsed the support systems that sustained the child's short breaths and the parents' deep hopes. For nearly two months the baby endured in the neo-natal unit under the care of the most prestigious doctors and devoted nurses that the city of Chicago had to offer. After two grueling months of prayers, incubators, and devoted healthcare, the baby arrived home healthy. The joy and gratitude to Hashem was overwhelming, but the young father did not forget his gratitude and appreciation to the mortal messengers, the entire medical and nursing staff, who worked arduously, day and night, to help insure the newborn's health.

He wanted to express his appreciation in a very special way. He searched gift shops and bookstores for a proper memento to show his appreciation, but he could not come up with an appropriate gift. A few days after the baby was brought home, the young father mentioned his dilemma to his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Svei, Dean of the Philadelphia Yeshiva.

"The nurses don't want perfume, and the doctors don't need pens," said Rabbi Svei. "What they want to see is the continued growth and health of your child. Every year, on his birthday, bring the child to the hospital and let the staff share in the joy of his growth and success! That will be the most meaningful gift you can offer!"

The Rosh Yeshiva explained: Before the Torah mentions an additional reward bestowed upon the midwives, it alludes to the greater reward that they truly appreciated. Their efforts towards Jewish perpetuity were not in vain. The nation prospered. The young babies, whom they worked so diligently to sustain, grew up. And they married, and they flourished. All the midwives wanted was the propagation of their nation. And that was their first reward. The gift of Houses of the Priesthood and the Houses of Royalty were an added bonus which was Hashem was pleased to deliver. But as far as the midwives were concerned, the greatest reward was the joy in seeing that the children they delivered flourished, and that the nation prospered and grew. All the risks were worth it for that knowledge alone. And so the Torah tells us, "and Hashem made good for the midwives, and the nation grew and flourished." For them, that was the greatest reward. The rest was just icing on the just desserts.

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fw from hamelaket@gmail.com from: Rabbi Yochanan Zweig <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbizweig@torah.org subject: Rabbi Zweig

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Professor William Schwartz. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

Root Cause of Antisemitism

But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were disgusted because of the people of Israel (1:12). On the face of it, this verse seems a little hard to understand. What exactly were the Egyptians disgusted with and for what reason? Rashi (ad loc) explains that "they were disgusted with their own lives." Though Rashi explains what they were disgusted with (their own lives) he doesn't provide the reason for their disgust and their harsh reaction. In fact, this has been an existential question that has haunted the Jewish people for two millennia: Why do so many people hate us? What did we ever do to them to incite the need to exterminate or expel us from their lands?

The answer is actually given in the verse itself. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were on a mission to eradicate the nation through excessive taxation and hard labor. Yet "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." In other words, the more they did to us the more successful we became, particularly in growing as a nation. Our incredible success under the harshest conditions highlighted their own inadequacies as a nation. It began to dawn on them that compared to the Jewish nation they were far inferior. That is why, Rashi explains, they

were disgusted with their own lives. Frankly, seeing our ascension made them feel terrible about themselves.

Unfortunately, this has been repeated throughout history. The Germans, soundly defeated after World War I, were both embarrassed and impoverished. This became a breeding ground for the most virulent antisemitism because they needed to feel that they weren't at fault; rather it was the fault of the Jews who controlled everything and were a malevolent subhuman life form. Therefore, the Jews should be exterminated. If one travels through Poland and Ukraine it will become readily apparent how miserable the populace is and why antisemitism is "mother's milk" in these countries. The root cause of antisemitism is a host country's deep dissatisfaction with their own lives; particularly as it is contrasted by the success of the Jews. Obviously, their ready solution to feeling better about themselves is to eliminate those that highlight their inadequacies.

A Deafening Silence

The Talmud (Sotah 11a) tells us that Pharaoh had three advisers: Yisro, Iyov, and Bilaam. When Pharaoh was deciding how to approach his "Jewish Problem" he sought the opinion of each of his three advisers. Bilaam, the grandson of Lavan (according to some opinions he actually was Lavan), was an evil man and relished the prospect of eradicating the Jewish people. It was he who advised Pharaoh to enslave the people, destroy their identity, and later to kill the male babies. Iyov was a righteous man who was opposed to any plan to destroy the Jewish nation. Yet, rather than display his true feelings on the issue, he refrained from offering any opinion. Perhaps he knew that his objections would be met with resistance. He most likely rationalized that he could do more to help the plight of the Jewish people at a later date by remaining in his position as advisor. As a result, he decided not to oppose or accept Bilaam's proposal, but remained silent.

Yisro, on the other hand, objected to Pharaoh's characterization of the Jews as a "problem" and rejected the idea of exterminating the Jewish people. Yisro's protests angered Pharaoh and Yisro had to flee Egypt in order to save his life. The Talmud continues by telling us that each of the three advisers was rewarded or punished according to his deed. Bilaam, who encouraged the execution of thousands of innocent Jews, was killed by the very people he sought to exterminate. Iyov, who remained silent in the face of Jewish oppression, was afflicted with a life of tremendous emotional pain (first he slowly lost all his possessions and then his children died) and physical suffering (his body became covered in boils to the point he wouldn't leave his house). Yisro, who fled because of his opposition, sacrificing his position of leadership and life of comfort and wealth in Egypt, eventually became the father-in-law of Moshe and his descendants became prominent judicial leaders of the Children of Israel.

We know that a very basic tenet of Judaism is that God repays a person measure for measure. Therefore, we can clearly understand the reward and punishment of Yisro and Bilaam. However, why was Iyov's punishment so severe? Iyov did not support the decree of persecution against the Jewish people. Iyov's only sin was remaining silent. Why then did he have to suffer such a harsh life, one where tragedy followed tragedy?

The reason that Iyov's suffering is clearly more severe than even Bilaam's punishment is because his reaction was the unwitting cause the Jewish nation's suffering in Egypt. How? In every generation there are madmen

who have no qualms about the murder of entire civilizations to achieve their warped goals. What keeps them in check? Mainstream society saying this is not okay, that the ends do not justify the means.

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The "Decision"

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The birth of Moshe represents a turning point of the Jewish saga in Egypt. This would-be savior is arrived as the Jewish slaves are being mercilessly crushed by Egyptian oppression. Pharo had legislated that all Jewish infants be flung into the Nile river and delivered to their inevitable death; Egyptian discrimination had begotten slavery and slavery had morphed into genocide. It appeared as if the entire Jewish nation was slated for annihilation. At this dark moment the greatest man to ever inhabit our planet is born. The epic birth of Moshe is preceded by verses describing the "marriage" of his parents- Amram and Yocheved. Stunningly, these verses conceal the true identity of Moshe's parents. The Torah merely narrates about a "man" from the house of Levi who married a "woman" from the house of Levi, subsequently giving birth to Moshe. Why is Moshe's birth introduced with the story of his parent's marriage which had occurred decades earlier? After all, Moshe was the third child and this couple had already produced two older siblings- Aharon and Miriam. Why is the birth of this future 'savior', who transformed Jewish history, framed with this mysterious marriage of people whose identities are disguised?

The Midrash fills in the blanks and provides an interesting "backstory". Facing devastating Egyptian cruelty, Amram, Moshe's father, separated from his wife Yocheved. Whether he formally divorced her is unclear, but he certainly discontinued normal marital relations. Expanding their family under these circumstances would be pointless and even pathetic - as it would just provide more fodder for the crocodiles of the Nile. Without any horizons of hope, continued family life seemed futile and ridiculous and Amram, at least initially, chose the only practical option- surrender.

His daughter Miriam- Moshe's older sister- intervened, pleading with her father to reconsider his fateful decision. As Amram was a high-profile leader, his decision would inevitably trigger "copycat behavior" leading to wide-scale divorces and the complete unraveling of Jewish family life in Egypt. Heeding his daughter's warning, Amram reunites with his wife Yocheved, reinforcing the value of Jewish family despite the unbearable pressure of Egyptian torture. For this reason, Amram's "decision" is presented anonymously: his "personal" decision to reunite with Yocheved had ripple effects for countless "other" marriages and therefore his decision is described in collective or generic terms.

This private decision ultimately reshapes human history. Amram faces a nightmarish world in which newborn babies are fed to voracious beasts. He sees no purpose in further expanding his family so he "folds his tent". However, he soon discovers that, although we can't always control the broader calculus of our "broken world, we can author our own personal decisions in response the surrounding chaos. We never abdicate the ability to maintain the "moral line" and make decisions of "conscience" even if the surrounding world doesn't accommodate those decisions. For reasons which often lie beyond human comprehension, G-d sometimes allows evil to flourish. It is difficult to decipher this mystery and we often struggle to understand Divine logic in a bleak world of rampaging evil. Despite these 'unknowns' and the frustration it sometimes causes we are empowered to maintain our own religious and moral convictions even if we can' calculate how these values will impact an uninviting world. Like Amram we often must act with moral courage and rely upon G-d to 'solve' the broader calculus.

I often ponder Holocaust survivors who quickly remarried and rebuilt their families while bringing new babies into their world. What were they thinking and how could they introduce new life into such a bleak and nightmarish world? Little did they know that the children born in the immediate aftermath of WWII would, one day, march in the fields of redemption and pioneer and new era of history. Little did they know that children born in refugee camps, or in temporary havens across the globe, would one day resettle the Jewish homeland on behalf of Jewish history.

They couldn't have foreseen this outcome and yet they labored on under unimaginable conditions, maintaining their moral courage. Human beings often must take the initiative, exhibiting fortitude and defiance even if the arch of history is confusing and the ultimate trajectory of their actions unclear. Our inability to decipher the broader equation doesn't acquit us from responsibility to sustain our religious and moral duties.

Chazal mention that after this reunion Yocheved – aged 130- experienced a physical rejuvenation, enabling her to become pregnant with a little boy named Moshe. Had Amram not heeded Miriam's call, this miraculous rejuvenation may not have occurred. Even it did, it may not have mattered, as Yocheved would have remained unmarried. G-d often awaits human initiative and provides supernatural intervention only after humans have defied their conditions and launched their own redemptive cycles.

The Amram saga also reminds us that moral energy, and not headline-grabbing events, drive human history. Amram's "epic" decision, hatched privately and without fanfare or public notice, changed history. It was a quiet decision to continue building family life under crushing conditions of persecution that turned the tide. In a modern world of fanfare and self-promotion, it is ever more crucial to remind ourselves that it is the daily 'unnoticed' moral decisions which alter history. Politics come and go and policies and decisions of one generation are quickly swept away by the sands of time or erased by future generations. Even military confrontations, which appear to deeply impact the shape of human experience, leave only temporary impressions upon history. More often it is the quiet moral decisions taken day after day – which go largely unnoticed- that shape our own lives and deeply impact the lives of our families and communities. The impact of these decisions can ricochet for generations- long after political and military influences have faded. With all of Pharo's decrees and public posturing, it was a quiet decision of a husband and would-be father that turned the tide of history.

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from: **Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff** <rabbiparkoff@gmail.com> date: Dec 23, 2021, 9:29 AM subject: Rabbi Parkoff's Chizuk Letter - Shmos - I Will Be What I Will Be: Gilui Shechina

Shemos

I Will Be What I Will Be: Gilui Shechina

Adapted from a lecture by Mori v'Rabi **Hagaon Hatzaddik Rav Zeidel Epstein ztzuk"**l, תשמ"ט.

And Moshe said to G-d, "Behold I will come to the children of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they will say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" G-d said to Moshe, "Ek-yeh asher Ek-yeh (I will be what I will be)." And He said, "So shall you say to the children of Israel, 'Ek-yeh (I will be) has sent me to you.'" (Shemos 3:13-14)

A simple reading of the possuk raises some questions. There are two statements explaining what Hashem's name is. Why did He have to repeat Himself?

Rashi (quoting Brachos 9b) appears to be addressing this question:

I will be what I will be: "I will be" with them in this oppression, "what I will be" with them in their future oppressions under other kingdoms. [Then] [Moshe] said before Him, "O Lord of the universe! Why should I mention to them more troubles? They have enough [difficulty] with this one." Hashem answered him, "You have spoken well. So shall you say, etc."

We see from Rashi, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe the meaning of the great Name: that not only is Hashem with them in Mitzrayim, He will be with them in their future oppressions in all the exiles (שעבוד מלכיות). Moshe thereupon became very perturbed. Why mention any other future problems?

It was like Hashem was saying, don't worry, there'll be more problems to come.

Then Hashem agreed to Moshe Rabbeinu and told him to only mention that Hashem will be with them and help them depart from Mitzrayim.

There is a parenthesis in Rashi: Not that Moshe, G-d forbid, outsmarted G-d. However, he did not understand what G-d meant. [He thought that Hashem was telling him to relate this to Yisroel.] Really, when G-d said, "I will be what I will be," He told this to Moshe alone, and never intended that Moshe should tell this to Yisroel. That is the meaning of "You have spoken well," for that was My original intention, that you should not tell such things to the children of Israel, only "So shall you say to the children of Israel," 'Ekyeh [I will be] has sent me.'"

According to this annotation, Hashem had always intended that Moshe Rabbeinu should only tell Klal Yisroel about the Yetzias Mitzrayim, and not about any future problems. Hashem told Moshe alone the real meaning of His name so that Moshe himself should know the truth.

However, the explanation of this annotation doesn't seem to fit the possuk. Moshe asked, what should I tell them and Hashem responded regarding the entire future events, not just the part about Mitzrayim. A simple reading doesn't suggest that Hashem's intention was for Moshe Rabbeinu alone to know this secret. The secret of this great Name Ekyeh asher Ekyeh was really meant for the entire Klal Yisroel. Just right now while suffering their tribulations in Mitzrayim they couldn't handle it. But it was written in the Torah for all of us to know. The explanation of the parenthesis doesn't fit the possuk. Moshe was asking what to tell all of Klal Yisroel and it wasn't a question that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to know personally only. Rather, he wanted to know what to tell Klal Yisroel. Rashi according to the annotation does not fit the possuk.

The Purpose of Creation

In order to answer this, we must first understand the basic purpose of the entire Creation: Hashem wants us to recognize and be vividly aware of Him. That is called Gilui Shechina (Revelation of Hashem's presence), when G-d can be clearly seen. Everyone should see Hashem's presence everywhere in everything. This is the purpose of the entire creation. The creation should announce and publicize אין עוד מלבדו Ein Od Milvado – There is no power other than Hashem! Just by observing how things operate in the world everyone should see that there is a Creator; just one, no other. One who understands, sees everything. And not just only one G-d. There is no other power. Everything in the universe is Hashem. Where ever one looks he should see the handiwork of G-d. When we look up to the heavens, we don't see just the heavens, we see Your heavens.

The entire creation shouts out "there is a Creator." It's like a painting from a famous painter from many years ago. It sells for thousands, because it's so and so's painting. It's an original. The experts look at it and they immediately recognize the painter. His expertise. His special style. It's obviously a Rembrandt or a Van Gough. Look how he wove the colors together and how it is so full of expression. We novices only see some colors.

Handwriting. You go to an analyst and write a few lines. All you see are some pen marks on the paper. It's nothing. But he looks at it and sees everything. This letter goes up, that letter goes down, and he sees your whole personality in those lines. All you see are some scribbles on the paper.

That's the Universe. Everywhere we look it utters: this was made by the Ribono Shel Olam. Before the sin, everything was pure and there was pure Gilui Shechina. Now after the sin, Hashem is hidden. That is called hester – הסתר. We don't see. But even in hester there is Gilui Shechina; unending Gilui Shechina.

That's our job. To see Shechina everywhere. We must remember that everywhere has the possibility to see Shechina; but it also has the power to cover over the Shechina so that all you see is Nature.

Rav Chaim Shmueleviz zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir, in Sichos Musar, Parshas Vayechi (תשל"א) writes that this darkness which is intertwined in Hashem's actions has a very important task. Hashem intentionally covers over His presence in everything and created "Nature" in order to allow us free will.

We know Hashem always hides the most wondrous miracles in natural phenomena. They always have the aura about them that they were actually merely natural or near natural phenomena. The miracle of the splitting of the Sea was covered over with nature: "And Hashem moved the water with a strong east wind the entire night…"

This was done to leave some room for mistake. Otherwise, it would be as if free will has been taken away from Mankind. Our job is to reveal the Shechina everywhere we can. We have to remember that nature is merely Hashem's way of giving us room to err.

The Ramban asks a difficult question. Chazal tell us that Yocheved, Moshe Rabbeinu's mother, was born on the trip down to Mitzrayim. In parshas Vayigash the Ibn Ezra asks, if so, when we make a simple calculation, we see that she was 130 years old when she gave birth to Moshe. Sarah was only 90 years old when she gave birth to Yitzchak and that was considered a miracle. Why wasn't Yocheved's giving birth at the age of 130 mentioned as a miracle? The Ramban then proceeds to enlighten us with a very important principle. Only miracles that are announced in advance by a prophet or a malach (angel) are mentioned in the Torah as miracles. Unannounced miracles that occur to help the tzaddikim are left unmentioned. Even the greatest miracles in which the laws of nature are openly circumvented, if not announced in advance, they go unmentioned. What the Torah calls a miracle is when a navi or a malach comes to inform us that it will happen.

Let us try to elucidate the Ramban's explanation. It fits in beautifully with what we said above. The purpose of a miracle is to make it clear that there is a Creator. There is no other reason for miracles. The Ramban (at the end of parshas Bo) states that all of nature is a miracle. The possuk in Krias Shema tells us that if we follow the Torah the rain will fall in the right time. Isn't that a miracle? And now that we have that possuk, if we don't follow the Torah, and the rain still falls, isn't that a miracle? All of nature is a miracle. But it is a hidden miracle. An open miracle is announced in advance in order to publicize it.

This is the difference between ha'oras panim and gilui Shechina as opposed to hester panim and hester Shechina. Gilui Shechina is to see the Ribono Shel Olam, and hester Shechina is when we don't see the Shechina.

We are used to thinking that when everything goes well and we see the bracha, that is gilui Shechina. But when everything is not good, when one is not healthy, when parnossa is hard, when he has problems, he is not receiving the bracha. That is hester.

That is a mistake.

R. Yaakov Emden writes that there is no miracle as great as the existence of Klal Yisroel among the goyim. When Yidden go through all their hardships and still continue to exist and remain Yidden that's the greatest miracle. R. Yaakov Emden writes, "We think that gilui Shechina is in ha'oras panim (when everything goes good). But when everything goes bad in hester panim there is no gilui Shechina. I will reveal to you a secret, writes Rav Yaakov Emden. In hester panim there is more gilui Shechina than in gilui Shechina alone. Because when there is hester, and yet the Ribono Shel Olam continues to support you, that's a miracle. The fact that the poverty-stricken person continues living and has a piece of bread to eat is a bigger miracle than the wealthy man's supper. The wealthy person's existence looks normal. He's got money, he has supper. But the poor man's supper is a miracle. When an ill person remains alive and continues living, we see more chessed than by a healthy person.

Let us return to Moshe Rabbeinu by the burning bush. Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Ribono Shel Olam, if Klal Yisroel ask me what Hashem's name is, what should I tell them? His question wasn't simply what Hashem's name is. Moshe Rabbeinu was asking how Hashem was interacting with Klal Yisroel. Hashem's name reflects His interaction with the world: chesed, rachamim, din, etc. Which attribute should I tell Klal Yisroel? Hakadosh Baruch Hu answered, "My name is Gilui Shechina, Ekyeh asher Ekyeh." As Rashi said "I am with them in this oppression, I will be with them in future oppressions.

I am always with them." This is the greatest Gilui Shechina possible: that Hashem is with us in our most difficult times. That's the most wonderful announcement possible. No matter what goes wrong, Hashem is with us. "Klal Yisroel is with Me, and I am with Klal Yisroel." Chas v'shalom we shouldn't lose sight of this. We have to constantly pay attention. Wherever Klal Yisroel went into galus, the Shechina went first. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu, Ekyeh asher Ekyeh, I'll be with you throughout all the tzoros, because in tzorus there is more Gilui Shechina, Tell Klal Yisroel the secret of Gilui Shechina, Moshe Rabbeinu answered, why should I tell them there will be more tzoros? They won't be able to understand the message that tzoros are the greatest Gilui Shechina. So the Ribono Shel Olam agreed, if they are not capable of accepting this statement for the moment, don't tell them. But Moshe Rabbeinu had to know it. And it's the truth. And now this truth was written in the Torah for us all to know.

The Ribono Shel Olam told Klal Yisroel, there isn't a minute that He doesn't think about Klal Yisroel. Our job is to never forget this. Wherever we mention Hashem's name, that is where bracha is.

Chazal have told us to make 100 brachos each day. Why 100 brachos each day? Because this is 100 times "bestowing His Name." Every time we make a bracha "baruch ato Hashem…" we are declaring, Ribono Shel Olam You are here. You are "the One who gives the tired person strength," "the One who frees a bound-up person," "the One who supports those who fall." You, everything is You. You give me a piece of bread to eat. Every time a Jew recites a bracha, he declares, "There is a Borei Olam." The same is true of tefilla. Tefilla means that we recite the idea that "I have nothing, everything belongs to the Creator." When we realize this we are allowing the bracha to come down upon us.

The Rambam states in his 13 Principles of Faith: "I believe with perfect faith that there is none other to whom it is proper to daven." There is nowhere else to ask, only the Ribono Shel Olam.

The avodah of a Yid is שויתי ה' לנגדי תמיד "I put Hashem before me constantly." And where do we find that? In the very beginning of the Shulchan Aruch. A person has barely woken up and he says Modeh Ani, he's fulfilling שויתי. And if there's a שויתי then there's a bracha. Mention Hashem's name, and that allows the bracha to flow. But if one doesn't recognize Hashem, if he rattles off the bracha without thinking, then the bracha won't take effect. It even has the opposite effect, it corrupts the world because he is proclaiming hester not gilui. The very first thing he must do is to proclaim, "Ribono Shel Olam, I know that everything that I have is from You."

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OU Torah Vayigdal Moshe
Shmos
Rabbi Benzion Twerski
וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים ב:כה

The pasuk says two things: a) Hashem saw, b) Hashem knew. The Beis Ha'Levi brings a Medrash that says there was a kitrug against Klal Yisrael of halalu ovdei avodah zarah v'halalu ovdei avodah zarah – why is Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu showing preference to the Jews if they were doing avodah zarah like the Mitzrim? The answer that Hashem gave to that charge is that, unlike the Mitzrim, the Jews were only doing avodah zarah as a result of the slavery and resultant madness (tiruf ha'daas) with which they were stricken. That is what the pasuk, according to this Medrash, is saying: Hashem saw the situation, and He knew that it was only as a result of the impossible circumstances that they slipped into avodah zarah.

The Beis Ha'Levi says that from this we see a definition of ohnes (something done out of coercion). Only if the person would not have done it otherwise, does the exemption of ohnes apply. The fact that the Beis Ha'Levi pins this idea on this particular Medrash apparently seems to be drush, but it is nonetheless a fundamental, very-practical concept.

Regarding shogeig (an aveirah done accidentally), as well, we find numerous times in Shas that it is only considered shogeig if the individual would not have done it had he known all the pertinent details. Therefore, someone who has accustomed himself to ignoring the prohibition of eating forbidden fats (cheilev), for example, cannot bring a korban chatas even if he one time ate cheilev by accident. Even though, at that current moment, he thought that he was eating shuman (permitted fats) and that is what he was intending to do, he still cannot bring a korban chatas, because even had he known it was cheilev, he would have no qualms eating it. The Gemara, based on darshening the pasuk, calls this someone who is not shav mi'yediaso – proper knowledge of the situation would not have stopped him from doing what he did.

It is not merely a gezeiras ha'kasuv that someone who is not a shav mi'yediaso cannot bring a korban chatas. It is that this teaches us the definition of shogeig. One is only a shogeig if the lack of awareness is what caused him to do the aveirah.

Likewise when it comes to ohnes. In every action, there are two components: the physical action itself, and the intention behind the action (daas). When someone holds a gun to a Jew's head and demands he eat a treif sandwich, why is that considered an ohnes? It is not as if the man stuffed the treif food down his throat. If someone grabbed his hand on Shabbos and forcibly hit the light switch with it, that is readily understandable as an ohnes, because the very action was completely coerced.

The Beis Ha'Levi is not talking about that type of ohnes. [Ed. note of elaboration: In other words, even someone who is a mumar to be mechaleil Shabbos would in fact still benefit from the exemption of ohnes if the actual physical action was coerced upon him, as in the case of someone grabbing his hand and pushing it against the light switch.]

But why is it that, when a Jew eats a treif sandwhich because he very much wants to save his life, it is considered an ohnes? The answer is that he is coerced as far as the intent is concerned. The decision to eat was forced upon him. If you think about it, you will see that most of the ohnsim in Shas are coercion vis a vis the daas component.

The fact that someone who knowingly did an aveirah is granted an exemption of ohnes when his decision was coerced upon him (whether by force, as in the above example, or by justifiable error in judgment) even though the action itself was not, is a chalos din. It is a particular status of exemption that the Torah assigns him. And someone who would have done the aveirah regardless of that ohnes is not given the benefit of that exemption.

A practical example of this would be in a situation of pikuach nefesh on Shabbos, and there are two Jewish ambulance drivers available: one frum and one who is a mechaleil Shabbos. One might have thought, "take the non-frum driver since he anyway is going to be mechalel Shabbos." But the truth is just the opposite. The frum driver has an exemption of ohnes. The mitzvah of va'chai bahem mandates that he do melacha to save another Jew's life. However, the non-frum driver does not have that. Since he would anyway do melacha, his chilul Shabbos – even in a case that would generally constitute an ohnes, such as pikuach nefesh – does not carry that exemption. It remains chilul Shabbos with all the severity thereof. Therefore, one must opt to take the frum driver.

Of course, if there is only a non-frum driver, one must go with him. Even though his chilul Shabbos R"l remains full fledged chilul Shabbos, even that is pushed aside because of va'chai bahem.

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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein** <ravbernstein@journeysintorah.com>
date: Dec 23, 2021, 6:59 AM
subject: Dimensions in Shemos
Signs for the Non-Believers
וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ ה'

Moshe responded and said, "But they will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say 'Hashem did not appear to you'."[1]

Introduction: "But they will not believe me"

The middle section of our parsha discusses the episode of the burning bush,

where Hashem appears to Moshe and charges him with taking the Jewish people out of Egypt. As our verse relates, Moshe was concerned that the people would not believe him. In response to this, Hashem provided him with three signs to perform in order to verify his status as Hashem's emissary.

Should Moshe have had Cause for Concern?

If we reflect on the situation of the Jewish people at that time we will better understand where Moshe's concerns were coming from.

Timing: Firstly, it was well-known that their exile had been foretold to their forefather, Avraham, who had been informed that it would last for four hundred years. The people had currently been in Egypt for little over two hundred years. Even if they harbored hope for the future redemption, that was not something they were expecting to see in their lifetimes.

Identity of the Redeemer: Additionally, even if they accepted the idea that they could be redeemed now, no one was expecting that the redeemer would be Moshe, whom they had not seen for decades. If anyone, it would be Aharon, who had been together with them and prophesying for them in Egypt during this time.

It would appear, then, Moshe was correct in suspecting that his message would be met with reservations on the part of the people. Moreover, the very fact that Hashem responded by providing Moshe with signs to verify his words, as opposed to simply saying "don't worry, the will believe you," indicates that Moshe was right in suspecting that such measures might be needed.

And yet, at the same time, this entire matter is completely astounding. For when we look just a few verses earlier,[2] we see that Hashem has already addressed this matter, explicitly assuring Moshe, "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקֹלֶךָ – they will listen to you"! How, then, could Moshe say – in direct contradiction of these words – that they people would not listen to him?[3]

Two Types of Listening

To answer the above question, let us consider that the idea of "listening to someone" can have more than one meaning:

It is possible to "listen to someone" in the sense of giving them a hearing and considering what they have to say, without necessarily then going along with it.

Another type of "listening to someone" denotes heeding their words and following what they say.

How can we know to which of these types of listening the Torah is referring? The key is in noting whether the "listening" is followed by the letter lamed – "lishmoa le'kol," or the letter beis – "lishmoa be'kol":

The letter lamed, which means "to", denotes distance from A to B. Hence, listening "לקול" indicates that the listener is distinct from the speaker and it is he who will determine whether or not he follows the speaker's wishes.

The letter beis, which means "with" or "in", denotes the proximity of A with B. Accordingly, listening "בקול" entails B heeding A's words and following them.

In Parshas Lech Lecha,[4] we are told of how Sarah (then Sarai), upon seeing that she had not born children, advises Avraham (then Avram) to take Hagar as a wife. The verse describes Avraham's response:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי

Avram listened to his Sarai's voice.

In that instance, Avraham heard Sarah's idea, considered it and concurred with it. Hence the term "לקול" is used.

In contrast to this, after the birth of Yitzchak, when Sarah sees that Yishmael is a danger to him and she demands of Avraham to banish Hagar and Yishmael from the house, we are told by the Torah that Avraham did not concur with this idea, rather, "the matter was very bad in his eyes"![5] Nevertheless, Hashem told Avraham to heed Sarah's voice in spite of his objections, and hence the term used is "בקול".

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקֹלָהּ

Everything that Sarah tells you, heed her voice.[6]

Applying this idea to our verses, we can see that here, too, Hashem's original assurance to Moshe was "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקֹלֶךָ". With these words, Hashem was telling Moshe that the people would give him a hearing. This, however, did not guarantee him a following, or that they would necessarily even believe him. This is especially understood when we consider why they would listen to him in the first place. Rashi explains that their attention was guaranteed on account of Moshe using the words "פָּקֹד פָּקַדְתִּי – I have indeed taken account,"[7] which were known to be the words with which the redeemer would introduce himself. However, the very fact that this was known meant that a person using these words did not necessarily mean he was the redeemer. It did ensure, however, that people would hear what he had to say, as denoted by the words "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקֹלֶךָ". In light of this, Moshe proceeds to raise the concern that, even after having heard his voice, "וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקֹלִי – they will not heed my voice." This concern was indeed validated by Hashem, Who then gave Moshe the signs to perform before the people.[8]

A truly stunning example of how attention to detail, down to the letter, opens up the words and messages of the verses.

The First Two Signs – Was the Second Sign Better than the First?

In response to Moshe's concerns, Hashem provided him with two signs in order to verify his status as the emissary for redemption:

His staff turned into snake upon being thrown onto the ground, returning to be a staff when he picked it up.

His hand became leprous when he placed it in his tunic, becoming healed again as he replaced it there.

After presenting the second sign, Hashem informs Moshe:

וְהָיָה אִם לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ לָךְ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקֹל הָאֹת הָרִאשׁוֹן וְהֶאֱמִינוּ לְקֹל הָאֹת הָאַחֲרוֹן

It shall be that if they do not believe you and do not listen to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the latter sign.[9]

The basic question is: Why would they believe the second sign more than the first. Given that both signs were miraculous, why would one miracle be more convincing than another?

Rashi presents a most astonishing answer to this question:

Once you tell them "I was stricken on your account, because I spoke lashon hara (slander) about you," they will believe you; for they have already learned regarding such matters that those who attack them in order to harm them are stricken with tzoraas, as were Pharaoh and Avimelech on account of Sarah.

The background to Rashi's explanation is the idea that the second sign, which involved Moshe's hand becoming leprous, came as a punishment for him speaking negatively about the Jewish people. Once he communicated this aspect of the sign to the people they would be more convinced that he was indeed Hashem's emissary.[10]

What emerges from this explanation of Rashi is that there was nothing about the second sign per se that made it more convincing than the first; rather, it was specifically the accompanying commentary that it came as a punishment that would hopefully bring the people round.[11] Needless to say, this explanation is categorized as drash, as it draws on an aspect of the sign which is not contained in the words of the verses themselves. This then leaves us wondering: Is there a pshat answer to why the second sign would be more convincing?

One of the great commentators on Rashi, the Be'er Yitzchak, explains that in fact there is no pshat answer to this question, because on a pshat level, the question doesn't begin.

Pshat and Drash – Literal and Non-Literal?

When coming to formulate the difference between pshat and drash, we might be inclined to phrase it as being that pshat represents the literal meaning of the words, while drash is the non-literal meaning. However, that formulation is not only imprecise, sometimes the exact opposite is true.

Pshat represents the straightforward reading of the verse. Sometimes, in order to arrive at the straightforward meaning, one is required to exercise a certain degree of latitude with the words, not necessarily taking them literally as stated. In our instance, there are commentators who explain that when Hashem says "if they do not listen to the first sign, they will listen to the second," it means, "the second sign together with the first." According to this

approach, the contribution of the second sign was not qualitative, but corroborative. In other words, there was not necessarily anything inherently more convincing about the second sign; rather, now there will be two signs, and two signs are more convincing than one.

Thus far on a pshat level. However, says the Be'er Yitzchak, one of the classic methods of drash is specifically to engage in the words as they were literally stated. In this instance, the words literally imply that the second sign by itself would be more convincing than the first, and hence the drash proceeds to explain why this is so, referencing the fact that it was a punishment for Moshe speaking negatively about the people.[12]

This is a truly fascinating idea in the world of the concepts of pshat and drash, as the Be'er Yitzchak himself describes it: "כלל גדול בדרך הדרשות – a Major principle regarding drash expositions!"[13]

Concluding Thoughts: What Did Moshe Say Wrong?

The question that remains is: Why is Moshe considered to have spoken lashon hara about the Jewish people? As we have seen, his concerns that people would not automatically believe him were perfectly legitimate and indeed corroborated by Hashem giving him signs to verify his status!

It appears that the answer lies in Moshe's opening word: "וְהֵן". This word simply appears to mean "And they [will not believe me]." However, if so, why does Moshe use the feminine form, and not the masculine form "וְהֵם"?

In truth, the word "הֵן" has another meaning – it means "behold" or "indeed", and denotes emphasis and certainty. When Moshe said "וְהֵן לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ לִי", he was saying, "It is certain that they will not believe me." In this regard, Moshe was considered to have slandered the Jewish people, for even if he was entitled – and perhaps even required – to address the possibility that the people might not believe him, he was not entitled to assert that they would definitely not believe him.

Thus understanding is corroborated by a passage in the Midrash[14] regarding Moshe's final days, during which Hashem informed him, " הֵן קָרְבוּ יָמֶיךָ לָמוּת – Behold, your days are drawing near to die."[15] The Midrash states:

כך אמר משה, רבונו של עולם, ב'הן' קלסתיך שכן כתיב "הֵן לַה' אֱלֹקֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם", וב'הן' אתה גוזר עלי מיתה? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא... אי אתה זוכר בשעה ששלחתיך לגאול אותם ממצרים ואמרת לי "וְהֵן לֹא יַאֲמִינוּ לִי"?

So said Moshe: "Master of the universe, I praised You with the word "הֵן", as it says, 'Behold (הֵן), to Hashem, your God, are the heavens and the highest heavens,' and with the word "הֵן" You are decreeing death upon me? Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to [Moshe]: "Do you not remember at the time I sent you to redeem them from Egypt that you said 'Behold (הֵן) they will not believe me'?"

With these words, Hashem was telling Moshe, "You may have been entitled to consider the possibility that they may not believe in you, but you were not entitled to not believe in them."

We may not be on Moshe's level where a single misplaced word can have such dire consequences, but we can, and should, certainly learn from this episode to our own lives in our dealings and interactions with our fellow Jews. As we regard others whose standards or sensitivities may be lacking in some respects, we can never consign them to such conduct or discount the possibility that they might change. They too, are children of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and one never knows when their Jewish soul will shine through.

[1] Shemos 4:1.
[2] 3:18.
[3] See commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Ramban to our verse and Moreh Nevuchim sec. 1 chap. 63.
[4] Bereishis 16:2.
[5] Ibid. 21:11.
[6] Ibid. verse 12.
[7] Shemos 3:16.
[8] Based on Gur Aryeh and Malbim to our verse. See also Shemos 18:19 and 24.
[9] Shemos 4:8.
[10] It is amazing to consider that the Jewish people, who had by now been subjected to decades of systematic, nation-wide oppression, with their tormentors apparently free of any repercussions, were convinced by the fact that Moshe, who had merely spoken negatively about them, was punished for doing so. This means that, although sorely tried, their expectation of Divine justice had not been extinguished.
[11] Rashi actually explains that the first sign also contained elements of censure for Moshe over his negative comments concerning the people: Hashem informed him that he deserved to be struck by the staff in his hand for speaking ill of them, and the staff then turned into a snake, the archetypical symbol of lashon hara. It is interesting, therefore, that the response in the event that the people did not believe the first sign was to provide a second sign, the compelling factor of which would be the accompanying commentary of punishment for lashon hara, and not simply to provide the same commentary for the already existing first sign.
[12] For this reason, when it comes to the third sign of turning water into blood, Rashi does not discuss why that sign would be more convincing than the first two. Since Hashem did not say regarding the third sign, "If they don't believe the first two, they will believe this third one," it is understood that the contribution of this sign was purely corroborative, i.e. there being three signs instead of two (Be'er Yitzchak ibid.).
[13] Another classic illustration of this idea comes from Rashi's comments on various verses that mention peoples' hands, e.g. Yaakov sending gifts to Esav "from that which came to his hand" (Bereishis 32:14), or a lesson regarding Korach that came from "Moshe's hand" (Bamidbar 17:5). Rashi first presents the pshat explanation, which in the former case means "from his domain," and in the latter case is "through his agency." However, he then adds the drash explanation which translates the word "hand" literally – in the first case referring to jewels that Yaakov gave Esav, and in the second case referring to Moshe's actual hand which turned leprous when he spoke negatively about the Jewish people at the burning bush. Regarding this matter, it is fair to say that the drash has the "ability" to translate these words literally, since it has the option of explaining them in a way that does not rely on pshat context.
[14] Devarim Rabbah 9:6.
[15] Devarim 31:14.

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SEFER SHMOT - Introduction

Is Sefer Shmot simply a continuation of Sefer Breishit - or is there something that makes it unique?

For example, are the Ten Commandments and the laws of Parshat Mishpatim included in this book, simply because they were given 'first' - or should we look for a thematic connection between those laws and the story of the Exodus?

As our series of shiurim rests on the assumption that each "sefer" [book] of CHUMASH [= the five 'books'] carries a unique theme, we will begin our study of Sefer Shmot in an attempt to identify its primary theme. Afterward, we will consider that theme in our study of each individual chapter or unit.

In our study of Sefer Breishit, we employed this approach to uncover its primary theme of "bechira" – i.e. how & why God chose Avraham Avinu to become the forefather of a nation that will bring the Name of God to mankind. In those shiurim, we demonstrated how that theme helped us understand the deeper meaning of each story and the progression of its events. Now, in our study of Sefer Shmot, we will employ a similar approach.

Therefore, we begin our study with quick overview of Sefer Shmot, in an attempt to find not only its underlying theme, but also its thematic connection to - and distinction from - Sefer Breishit.

A TABLE OF CONTENTS

To identify a common theme of any book, it is helpful to first make a list of its major topics and then to contemplate what connects these topics together.

Let's see what happens when we apply this approach to Sefer Shmot.

If we limit ourselves to a discussion of the most general categories, I think that everyone would agree with the following table of contents for Sefer Shmot:

1) "Yetziat Mitzraim" (the Exodus/ chaps. 1->17)
   [including the journey to Har Sinai]
2) "Ma'amad Har Sinai" (the Theophany / chaps. 18->24)
   [including the mitzvot of Parshat Mishpatim]
3) "The Mishkan" (the Tabernacle / chaps. 25->31)
   [God's commandment to build the Mishkan]
4) "Chet ha'Egel" (the sin of the Golden Calf/ 32->34)
   [including the story of the second luchot]
5) "Building the Mishkan" (its construction/ 35->40)
   [concluding with the "shchina" dwelling thereupon]

Therefore, to identify an overall theme for the entire book, we must search for a theme that connects all of these topics together.

RAMBAN'S APPROACH - GALUT & GEULAH

Ramban, in his short introduction to Sefer Shmot, attempts to do exactly this, i.e. to identify a common theme for the entire book. [It is recommended that your first read this Ramban.]

After defining Sefer Breishit as "sefer ha'yetzira" [the book of the creation of the world and of the people of Israel (and hence the patterns of its history)], Ramban proceeds to explain why Sefer Shmot begins with the story of Yetziat Mitzraim:

> "... after completing Breishit, a special sefer is dedicated to describe the first "galut" [exile] as specifically decreed [in Sefer Breishit [see 15:13-16] and Bnei Yisrael's redemption from that GALUT..." (see Ramban's intro to Shmot1:1)

After explaining why Sefer Shmot begins with 'the redemption from exile' (as forecasted in Sefer Breishit), next Ramban must explain the progression in Sefer Shmot from Yetziat Mitzraim to Ma'amad Har Sinai, and then to the Mishkan:

> "... and the GALUT is not over until they [Bnei Yisrael] return to the level of their forefathers... and even once they achieve their freedom from Egypt, they are not considered redeemed yet, for they still wander in the desert... But once they arrive at HAR SINAI to receive the Torah and build the MISHKAN, and God's shechina dwells upon them - then they return to the level of their forefathers... and are then considered totally REDEEMED..."

Note how Ramban understands the concept of "geulah" [redemption] as the underlying theme of the **entire** Sefer. This allows him to identify a common theme to the various topics of Yetziat Mitzraim, Matan Torah, and Mishkan. Although one could argue with Ramban's conclusions, he clearly assumes - as we did in our introduction - that there is a need to study each "sefer" in search of its unifying theme. In fact, Ramban opens his commentary to each "sefer" of Chumash in a very similar manner, i.e. with an attempt to identify its theme, and thus explain its flow of topic.

In our own study of Sefer Shmot, we will follow a direction similar to Ramban's, showing how all the various stories in Sefer Shmot carry a common theme (even though we may arrive at a slightly different conclusion). However, we begin our own study by focusing a bit more on its thematic connection to Sefer Breishit.

FROM BREISHIT TO SHMOT

We can readily understand why Sefer Shmot begins with the story of Yetziat Mitzraim, as that story appears to continue the narrative of Sefer Breishit. However, if Sefer Shmot simply continues the story of Sefer Breishit, why is it necessary to begin a new book?

To help clarify how these books differ, let's consider Sefer Breishit as God's '**master-plan**', while Sefer Shmot can be understood as the first stage of its '**implementation'**.

In other words, the "bechira" process - that emerged as the primary theme of Sefer Breishit - can be viewed as God's master plan for the creation of a special nation that will one-day represent Him and sanctify His Name. As such, the book began with the underlying reason for God's need of this nation (chapters 1->11), followed by His choice of the forefathers of that nation - and hence the stories of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov -focusing on the covenantal promises and which specific children would be chosen (chapters 12->50). This 'planning stage' reaches its conclusion as all of Yaakov's children are not only chosen, but also united (after the events of "mechirat Yosef") - and the 'seeds' of this nation have planted in the land of Egypt.

Sefer Shmot can be viewed as the first stage in God's implementation of this plan.

Recall God's opening promise to Avraham Avinu that he will become a "goy gadol" - a great nation (see 12:1-3). That's the 'plan'- therefore, Sefer Shmot begins by explaining HOW Bnei Yisrael became that great nation (Shmot 1:1-6).

Recall as well that in His covenant with Avraham Avinu ("brit bein ha'btarim" /see 15:13-18), God forecasted a period of 'slavery and oppression in a foreign land'; hence the first chapter of Sefer Shmot continues with the story of how that enslavement began (see 1:7-20). In the ensuing story of the Exodus (Shmot chapters 2 thru 15), God fulfills that next stage of that covenant by punishing their oppressor and redeeming His nation from Egypt.

The next major topic of Sefer Shmot is "Ma'amad Har Sinai" - which flows directly from the story of Yetziat Mitzraim - for in order for God's master plan to be fulfilled, Bnei Yisrael must receive a set of laws that will make them that special nation. To prepare them for that transformative moment, various events take place on their journey from Egypt to Mount Sinai (see Shmot chapters 14 thru 17). Upon their arrival at Sinai, the covenant is finalized and the first set of Laws are given, as described in Shmot chapters 18 thru 24. [In our of detailed study, we will also explore the thematic connection between "brit Sinai and "brit mila" ("l'hiyot lcha l'Elokim -see Breishit 17:7-11).

From this point on, the logic behind the progression of topics in Sefer Shmot becomes more difficult to ascertain. Considering that Bnei Yisrael arrive at Har Sinai to receive the entire Torah, we would expect Sefer Shmot to record ALL the mitzvot they received at that time. Instead, Sefer Shmot records only SOME of those mitzvot (the "dibrot" & Parshat Mishpatim), and then focuses primarily on the mitzvot relating to the Mishkan, while other commandments given at Har Sinai are recorded elsewhere in Chumash – i.e. in Vayikra, Bamidbar, and Devarim.

In our study of Sefer Shmot, we will need to explain why only one unit of those mitzvot (i.e. the laws in Parshat Mishpatim) are recorded in Sefer Shmot ;and then consider why its focus shifts exclusively to the laws of the Mishkan.

For example, in his commentary to Shmot 25:1, Ramban explains why specifically the Mishkan (chapters 25 thru 31) emerges as the next major topic – for Bnei Yisrael now require a symbol of their special relationship with God. The Mishkan will remind Am Yisrael of their covenantal responsibilities; allow the nation to approach God, and demonstrate (to themselves and the other nations) how God dwells in their midst.

Our shiurim will also discuss Rashi's approach, highlighting the intricate thematic connections between Mishkan, Maamad Har Sinai **and** the sin of the Golden calf ["chet ha'egel"].

In light of the events of "chet ha'egel", a serious doubt arises concerning the very possibility of this special relationship. Sefer Shmot describes how that first covenant is broken, and how and why a new covenant is be forged that must include God's attributes of Mercy (see Shmot chapters 32 thru 34). In its aftermath, the Mishkan is finally built and God's presence dwells with His Nation (chapters 35 thru 40), a sign that the relationship has been fixed.

When Sefer Shmot reaches its conclusion, everything is ready for what should be the next stage of God's master plan – i.e. Bnei Yisrael should travel from Har Sinai to Canaan and inherit the Land. Why that does not happen, will emerge as a primary topic in our study of Sefer Bamidbar.

Based on this thematic setting, our opening shiur (on Parshat Shmot) will discuss the significance of God's "hitgalut" to Moshe Rabeinu at the burning bush, while the shiurim on Parshiot Va'eyra & Bo will focus on Moshe's mission to prepare Bnei Yisrael for their redemption. Our shiur on Parshat B'shalach will discuss the need for the various events that take place during Bnei Yisrael's journey from Egypt to Har Sinai. In Parshiot Yitro & Mishpatim we will discuss the dialectic nature of the events at Ma'amad Har Sinai, as well as the special nature of the mitzvot in Parshat Mishpatim and their covenantal significance. Finally, our shiurim from Parshat Terumah through Parshat Pekudei will focus on the conceptual relationship between the Mishkan, Ma'amad Har Sinai and "chet ha'egel."

As usual, it is highly recommended that you use the study questions to prepare for the shiurim (even though the shiurim are written so that you can follow even without advanced preparation). Also, it is helpful to study using a Tanach Koren (or similar). This will make it much easier for you to determine the flow of topic and theme from 'parshia' to 'parshia.'

b'hatzlacha!
menachem

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INTRO PART II /

For Parshat Shmot

USING OUTLINES

We conclude our introductory shiur by bringing an example of how 'outlining' the flow of 'parshiot' can serve as an excellent study tool, especially helpful when searching for a central theme in any given unit.

In the following table we first list each 'parshia' in Parshat Shmot - and assign a short title to describe its primary topic.

Afterward, we will attempt to transform this list into an outline, by considering its thematic progression.

[It will help show how Parshat Shmot 'sets the stage' for the upcoming events in Sefer Shmot, as discussed in our introductory shiur.]

	'PARSHIA'	**TOPIC**
	1:1-7	Bnei Yisrael multiply, becoming a nation in Egypt. (linking Sefer Breishit to Sefer Shmot)
	1:8-22	The enslavement and its hardships begin
	2:1-22	The birth and early life of Moshe Rabeinu [up until his arrival in Midyan]
	2:23-25	God hears the crying out of Bnei Yisrael
.		
**	3:1-4:17	God's "HITGALUT" TO MOSHE AT THE "SNEH" [Moshe receives his MISSION & clarifications].
	4:18-26	Moshe leaves Midyan to fulfill his mission.
	4:27-4:31	Moshe meets the elders, to inform the nation in regard to their forthcoming redemption
	5:1-3	Moshe & Aharon go to Pharaoh, requesting permission to worship God in the desert
	5:4-6:1	The mission appears to backfire; Pharaoh doubles their workload.

[Chapters 6 thru 14 describe how his mission is completed!]

BUILDING UP TO THE BURNING BUSH

We posit that the story of God's "hitgalut" [revelation] to Moshe at the burning bush should be considered the highlight of Parshat Shmot, for the mission that Moshe receives at the "sneh" - to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt - will emerge as the primary topic of the first half of Sefer Shmot, while the first two chapters serve as important background for that "hitgalut".

Let's explain how and why:

Recall from our shiurim on Sefer Breishit how its primary theme [the "bechira" process] progressed with each "hitgalut", i.e. each time that God spoke to the Avot. For example, in God's first "hitgalut" to Avraham Avinu, He introduced the concept of a special nation. In each subsequent "hitgalut" to the Avot, the details of God's future relationship with that nation slowly unfolded.

In a similar manner, we will see how the primary theme of Sefer Shmot is first introduced in God's opening "hitgalut" to Moshe Rabeinu at the burning bush (see 3:1->4:17).

As this "hitgalut" is not described until chapter three, the first two chapters of Sefer Shmot serve as their 'backdrop':

- The first parshia in Sefer Shmot (1:1-7) explains how Bnei Yisrael became a NATION in the land of Egypt, thus fulfilling God's promise to Yaakov in the final "hitgalut" of Sefer Breishit (see 46:3-4 & our shiur on Vayigash).
- The next parshia (1:8-22) describes how the enslavement began, as foreseen in "brit bein ha'btarim" (15:13-15).
- The first 'parshia' in Chapter two (2:1-22) describes how God prepares His redemption with the story of birth of Moshe Rabeinu until he runs away to Midyan.
- In the final 'parshia' (2:23-25), we told of how the redemption finally begins, as God hears the cries of Bnei Yisrael's oppression.

The stage is now set for God's opening "hitgalut" to Moshe Rabeinu in chapter three, where he will receive his mission to

redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt and bring them to the Promised Land.

To better appreciate how the progression of topics in that key 'parshia', we now demonstrate another tool - that is also helpful when studying Chumash. We take an individual 'parshia', and divide it into paragraphs, and then make an outline to help follow its progression.

The following outline organizes this entire 'parshia', i.e. from 3:1 to 4:17 - highlighting its progression of topics:

I. INTRODUCTION

A. 3:1-3 Moshe notices the 'burning bush'
B. 3:4-6 God identifies Himself to Moshe

II. THE MISSION

A. 3:7-8 God heard their cry, therefore He is coming:
To redeem them, and bring them to Israel:

B. 3:9-10 Moshe is charged to go to Pharaoh
And take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt-

III. QUESTIONS AND CLARIFICATIONS
(re: how to accomplish this mission)

A. 3:11-12 How can I to go to Pharaoh, & take them out
B. 3:13-22 What precisely do I tell Bnei Yisrael & Pharaoh
C. 4: 1- 9 Why (and how) should they believe me
D. 4:10-17 How can I, specifically, be Your spokesman

Let's explain:

First, God identifies Himself to Moshe Rabeinu (I) and then explains to him the mission and its purpose (II).

At the **center** of this outline lies God's charge to Moshe that he take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt (II-B).

Finally, Moshe responds to this assignment by asking several questions regarding how he is to accomplish his mission (III).

GOD'S MESSAGE AT THE SNEH

What was the purpose of the "hitgalut" at the burning bush? As we will discuss in our shiur on Parshat Shmot, it did much more than just supply Moshe Rabeinu with some information. Rather, God will give Moshe a very complex mission, while explaining its goals and purpose.

In our shiurim on Parshat Shmot and Va'eyra, we explain what this mission is all about, noting that Moshe actually receives a DOUBLE mission.

Afterward, we will see how the next set of parshiot (chapters 6->17) will describe how Moshe actually completes this mission.

Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

PARSHAT SHMOT Let My People Go

Was Moshe Rabeinu's plea of 'Let My People Go' just a HOAX?

As preposterous as this might sound, Rashbam claims that this is the only way to explain the story in Sefer Shmot!

In this week's shiur, we uncover the basis for this daring interpretation by Rashbam, while arriving ourselves at a very different conclusion.

INTRODUCTION

From youth, we are so familiar with the story of the Exodus that we rarely pay attention to the Torah's detail of that story. However, when one undertakes a careful reading of the first fourteen chapters of Sefer Shmot (as Rashbam does), the story that unfolds is quite different from what is commonly assumed.

In the first section of our shiur, we will review the story of the Exodus in the Bible to prove Rashbam's basic assertion - that Moshe **never, not even once,** asks Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael freedom from slavery, or to emigrate to the land of Israel. Instead, each time when Moshe goes to Pharaoh and demands 'Let My People Go', he is only requesting permission to allow Bnei Yisrael a three-day journey to worship their God in the desert.

Afterward we must explain why Moshe never tells Pharaoh the 'whole truth', and why this was all part of God's master plan.

In the second section of the shiur, we will show how this analysis serves as the foundation for Rashbam's conclusion that this 'master plan' is merely a 'hoax'.

In the third section, we will question this conclusion, and offer a different approach that will help us better appreciate the theological significance of the entire process of the Exodus.

PART ONE

FREEDOM OF RELIGION or FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY

It is quite understandable why the saying 'Let My People Go' is commonly understood as a plea for freedom from slavery. After all, this was Moshe's recurring plea to Pharaoh just about every time they met. Furthermore, the holiday of Passover, when we commemorate the events of the Exodus, is commonly associated with freedom from slavery ['zman cheruteinu']. Therefore, it only makes sense that people would understand Moshe's demand that Pharaoh 'let his people go' as a request for freedom.

However, when we undertake a careful analysis of the story of the Exodus in the Bible, it becomes quite clear that Moshe is making a totally different request, relating more to 'freedom of religion' than to 'freedom from slavery'.

The proof of this point is rather tedious but very straightforward. All that we need to do is to follow the plot that unfolds in Sefer Shmot, tracing each time that Moshe Rabeinu goes to Pharaoh to make demands on behalf of Bnei Yisrael.

MOSHE'S REQUEST FROM PHARAOH

To be thorough, we begin our analysis by first examining God's original instruction to Moshe concerning his mission to Pharaoh, as explained to Moshe at the burning bush:

> "...Then you and the elders shall go to the King of Egypt and tell him: The God of the Hebrews had come and told us - we must embark upon a **journey of a three day distance into the desert to offer sacrifices to our Lord**" (see 3:18).

As you review this pasuk and its context, note how this demand to Pharaoh makes no mention of any request for freedom from slavery. Instead, Moshe is instructed to demand that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael the right to worship their God in the desert (at a site a three day distance from Egypt).

And this is precisely what Moshe does when he first goes to Pharaoh. Let's take a careful look at the Torah's description of that first confrontation in chapter five:

> "Afterward, Moshe and Aharon came and said to Pharaoh: Thus said the God of Israel, let My People go and **worship Me in the desert**. [Pharaoh refuses.] And they answered: the God of the Hebrews has called upon us to embark upon a **journey of a three day distance into the desert** in order that we may **sacrifice to our God**, **lest He strike us with 'dever'** (pestilence) **or 'cherev'** (sword)." (5:1-3)

Note once again that all we find is Moshe's request to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship God in the desert; no more - no less!

However, we must also pay attention to the implication of the final phrase of this pasuk - "lest he strike us with **dever** or **cherev**". Moshe warns Pharaoh that should he not allow Bnei Yisrael this journey to worship their God in the desert, a severe Divine punishment will ensue and many people - Egyptians & Hebrews - mayl die from 'dever' or 'cherev'. Hence, Moshe's demand implies that it may be in the 'best interests' of the Egyptian people - to allow Bnei Yisrael this 'short vacation' to worship their God in the desert. [See Ibn Ezra & Chizkuni on 5:3.]

The outcome of this first encounter is disastrous for the people of Israel, for Pharaoh not only refuses this request, he is so angered by it that he doubles their workload (see 5:4-10).

Nonetheless, God commands Moshe once again to go to Pharaoh and demand once again that he grant them permission to worship Him in the desert. This time, however, God will provide Moshe with some 'leverage' by performing miracles whose purpose will be to convince Pharaoh to take his warning seriously.

This background can help us appreciate God's explanation of the purpose of the Ten Plagues, when He speaks to Moshe in chapter seven. As a response to Pharaoh's refusal statement of: "lo **yada'ti** et Hashem" [I never heard of this God] (see 5:2), God explains to Moshe that the purpose of the plagues will be to convince Pharaoh that the God of the Hebrews indeed exists and He will bring plagues if His people do not worship him:

> "And Pharaoh will not listen to you, so I will put My Hand against Egypt, and I will take People out with great punishments - "**ve-yad'u** Mitzrayim ki Ani Hashem" - so that Egypt will know that I am God" (see 7:4-5).

It will take ten Plagues to finally convince Pharaoh that it is in his best interest to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship their God; nevertheless, when Pharaoh finally allows Bnei Yisrael to leave (after the Tenth Plague), it was only in order to worship their God. To our surprise, Pharaoh never granted Bnei Yisrael freedom from slavery, or permission to emigrate! Nor did Bnei Yisrael ever ask for it.

To prove this interpretation, we need only note how Moshe prefaces each and every warning to Pharaoh before a plague begins. For example, before the first plague, God instructs Moshe:

> "Go meet Pharaoh in the morning... and say to him: Hashem, the God of the Ivrim has sent me to you demanding Let My People Go and **worship Me in the desert**, and behold you have yet to listen. Thus says the Lord, with this (plague) you will know that I am God..." (see 7:14-17).

Then, in each successive plague we find an almost identical opening warning: "**shlach et ami** - Let My people go – **ve-ya'avduni ba-midbar** - so that they can **worship** Me in the desert", [or else ...]

> See 7:16 (first plague); 7:26 (second plague); 8:16 (fourth plague); 9:1 (fifth plague); 9:13 (seventh plague); and 10:3 (eighth plague). [Note that Plagues 3,6, and 9 don't have any pre-warning.]

As you review these psukim and their context, you will also notice that this is all that Moshe requests. Not even once does he ever even hint to Pharaoh that Bnei Yisrael plan to leave for good!

NEGOTIATIONS & MORE NEGOTIATIONS

This interpretation can also help us understand the various negotiations that take place between Moshe and Pharaoh during the Ten Plagues. If you follow their conversations, you'll find that they focus ONLY on this issue of a three-day journey to worship God, and NEVER on 'emigration rights to Palestine'.

Let's cite several examples that show the progression of these negotiations. Note how Pharaoh slowly acquiesces to Moshe's demand (to allow Bnei Yisrael to worship God in the desert).

ROUND ONE:

After 'makkat arov' (the fourth plague), Pharaoh finally budges. He grants Bnei Yisrael permission to worship their God, but not in the desert, rather **within** the Land of Egypt (see 8:21-23). But once again, pay careful attention to how Moshe rejects this proposal for technical reasons. Moshe claims that if Bnei Yisrael would offer sacrifices in the land, the local population of Egypt would 'stone them'. Therefore, Moshe insists that Bnei Yisrael can only worship God in the desert.

Pharaoh then agrees to allow a short journey into the desert, but not a three-day distance:

> "And Pharaoh said, I will send you out so that you can worship your God in the DESERT, but don't go too far away..." (see 8:24).

However, once that plague ended, Pharaoh hardened his heart once again and reneged on his promise (see 8:25-28). Even though Pharaoh is clearly worried about giving Bnei Yisrael permission to leave, he never accuses Moshe that he may be planning to run away! Likewise, Moshe himself never mentions the possibility that they may not return. [Later in the shiur we will discuss what Pharaoh is afraid of.]

ROUND TWO:

Later, after Moshe warns of the impending plague of locusts, Pharaoh's own servants demand his concession to Moshe (see 10:7). In response, Pharaoh enters into a new round of negotiations with Moshe that eventually reach an impasse over the issue of WHO can leave. Moshe insists that even the women and children come along, while Pharaoh allows only the men to leave (see 10:7-11).

Again, note the reason for Moshe's insistence on allowing the women and children to join; not because they are leaving forever, but rather - "for all family members need to worship God" (see 10:9). Never does he tell Pharaoh that everyone must go because the entire nation plans to migrate to Eretz Canaan. Moshe's various 'excuses' all imply that he plans to return.

ROUND THREE:

Finally, after the ninth plague ['choshech'], Pharaoh conducts one final round of negotiations. This time, he is willing to grant permission even for the women & children to leave, but not their sheep and cattle (see 10:24-25). Once again, Moshe counters with a 'technical reason', claiming that all the animals must come along, since they are not sure precisely which type of animals God will request for a sacrifice (see 10:26!).

In summary, at every stage of these negotiations, Moshe consistently rejects any concession or compromise, insisting that EVERYONE must go. Still, despite numerous opportunities, he NEVER even suggests that they plan to leave for good. Likewise, no matter how resolutely Pharaoh sticks to his hard line, he NEVER states a suspicion that Bnei Yisrael may be leaving forever.

EVEN AFTER THE TENTH PLAGUE!

In the Torah's account of the Exodus (in the aftermath of the Tenth Plague / see 12:29-36) we find conclusive proof for this interpretation. Note Pharaoh's immediate reaction when he hears reports of the death of the Egyptian first born:

> "... and he [Pharaoh] called to Moshe and Aharon at night and said: Get up and get out... and GO WORSHIP your God - "ke-daberchem" - as you (originally / in 5:3) requested! Even your sheep and cattle take with you, as you requested (in 10:26), and BLESS ME AS WELL..." (see 12:31-33).

The tenth plague awakens Pharaoh to the realization that Moshe's original warning of 'dever' or 'cherev' (see 5:3) has actually come true. Now, he finally gives in to the very last of Moshe's demands - allowing them to take their sheep and cattle with them on their journey to the desert. (Recall that is where the last set of negotiations broke down.)

Not only does Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael a three-day journey to offer 'korbanot', he even requests that Moshe will pray there on his behalf (to make a MISHEBERACH for him - see 12:32 "u-berachtem gam oti")!

Clearly, even after the Tenth Plague, Pharaoh only grants Bnei Yisrael permission to worship God in the desert! And for the very simple reason - that's all that Moshe ever asked for!

This also explains why the entire Egyptian nation urges Bnei Yisrael to leave as quickly as possible (see 12:33-35). They want to make sure that Bnei Yisrael can sacrifice to their God as soon as possible - thereby bringing this horrifying plague to an end (see 12:33). This explains beautifully why the Egyptians 'LEND' ['va-yish'alu'] Bnei Yisrael their finest wares, to encourage them to leave as quickly as possible (see 12:35-36). As Bnei Yisrael are

only taking a 'holiday leave' to worship their God, the Egyptians have every reason to assume they will return afterward back to Egypt - and bring back what they 'borrowed'.

The Torah uses the word 'borrowed' to describe what Bnei Yisrael took from the Egyptians, for that's exactly what they did!

THE LAST 'TRICK'

A final proof for this interpretation is found in Parshat Beshalach when Pharaoh is totally astonished when he finds out that Bnei Yisrael had 'run away':

> "And it was told to the King of Egypt - ki BARACH ha-am - that the people had RUN AWAY..." (see 14:5).

Now, this pasuk makes sense only if Pharaoh had not granted them total freedom, but only a permit to temporarily worship God in the desert. Had he actually set them free, why would he be shocked to hear that the people had 'run away'?

However, according to our interpretation, Pharaoh is shocked for the opposite reason - because Bnei Yisrael DID NOT travel into the desert. This may sound a bit complicated, so let's explain by taking a careful look at these psukim.

First of all, recall from 12:37 and 13:17-18 that Bnei Yisrael had left Egypt traveling toward the desert. Then, in the middle of that journey, God suddenly commands Moshe to execute a 'turn-around' maneuver.

> "And God told Moshe, tell Bnei Yisrael to TURN AROUND and set up camp... near the Red Sea. [In order that] Pharaoh will say they are wandering in the land (of Egypt), for the desert has closed them in" (see 14:1-4).

In other words, God commands Bnei Yisrael to turn around in order to convince Pharaoh that they are not going to the desert. Had Bnei Yisrael continued on their journey towards the desert, Pharaoh would have had no reason to chase them. After all, he wants them to go to the desert to worship their God, as they requested. It is specifically because they DON'T go to worship God, but instead RETURN TO EGYPT and set up camp by the Red Sea, that Pharaoh concludes:

> "...what have we done [we've been tricked!], for we have set Bnei Yisrael free from their slave labor!" (see 14:5).

It is only now that Pharaoh realizes that Bnei Yisrael have left slavery. What leads him to this conclusion? The answer is quite simple.

Let's consider what Bnei Yisrael have done. Clearly, they did not travel to the desert (as they had requested). However, they also do not return to their homes in Goshen, i.e. to their slavery. Nor do they travel towards Eretz Canaan. Instead, they stay in Egypt, and set up camp by the sea. So what are they up to?

Pharaoh reaches the obvious conclusion. Bnei Yisrael have implicitly declared their independence - in the Land of Egypt! Therefore, for the sake of his national security, Pharaoh must immediately declare war on this rebellious nation (see 14:6-10). If he doesn't attack them first, they surely will soon attack him. After all, they are numerous, and armed (see 13:18).

In fact, this was Egypt's greatest fear from the very beginning. Recall that the enslavement began because Bnei Yisrael had become so numerous that Egypt feared that they would take over their own country (see 1:8-10, and Rasag, Rashi and Ibn Ezra on 1:10)!

Pharaoh's decision to attack ultimately leads to Bnei Yisrael's momentous salvation at the Red Sea. [That topic will be discussed in detail in our shiur on Parshat Beshalach.] It also explains why Bnei Yisrael can keep the various wares that they had 'borrowed' from the Egyptians. After Egypt declared war on Bnei Yisrael, their 'bank accounts' are 'frozen'.

There can be no two ways about it. This is the 'story of the Exodus' in the Bible. Despite the numerous movie versions and the popular understanding that 'Let My People Go' is a request for 'freedom from slavery', in Chumash it is simply a request for the 'freedom to worship God in the desert'!

Surely, this interpretation raises many questions.

First of all, with the Ten Plagues 'up his sleeve [or staff]', Moshe is in a position to demand just about anything he wants from Pharaoh. Why should he ask for a 'three day vacation' when he can ask for total freedom?

Furthermore, what does he gain by not telling the 'whole truth'?

In Part Two of our shiur, we will first discuss Rashbam's approach to this question, showing how the above analysis forms its basis. Afterward, we will suggest an explanation of our own.

LET MY PEOPLE GO - PART TWO

In our introductory shiur to Sefer Shmot, we explained that God did not appear to Moshe (at the 'sneh') simply to provide him with some information, rather God charges Moshe with a MISSION:

> "And now go for I am sending you to Pharaoh - and TAKE My people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (3:10).

Note that at first, God instructs Moshe to take His nation out of Egypt, without providing even a clue concerning HOW to get the job done!

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

As we would expect, Moshe Rabeinu is startled by God's commandment. Considering his having been a fugitive from Egypt for many years, why should Pharaoh even allow him an audience? Furthermore, Moshe has been away from his people for most of his adult life. [Recall that he ran away at a rather young age and returns only at age eighty!] How could they possibly accept him as their official leader?

Therefore, Moshe's immediate response to this command is quite understandable:

> "And Moshe said to God: WHO am I that I can go to Pharaoh, - VE-CHI OTZI - and [HOW can I] take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt?!" (See 3:11, read carefully.)

No matter how we translate the phrase 've-chi otzi' in this pasuk (its precise definition is a bit problematic), it certainly seems that Moshe is asking HOW he is supposed to take Bnei Yisrael out. However, God's answer to his question does not seem to address this issue at all:

> "And He said: For I will be with you, and this is the sign that I have sent you - WHEN you take the Nation out of Egypt, you shall worship Elokim on this mountain" (see 3:12).

How does this answer Moshe's question? Moshe asks HOW he is supposed to take them out, and God tells him what to do AFTER he takes them out! What Moshe asks - God never answers, and what God answers - Moshe never asked!

Now there are two basic approaches to solve this problem. Either we can 'reinterpret' Moshe's question to fit God's answer [see Rashi & Seforno], or we can 'reinterpret' God's answer to fit Moshe's question [see Rashbam].

In our shiur we will deal primarily with the latter interpretation. But before we begin, let's take a quick glance at Rashi's approach.

RASHI - 'FOR WHAT PURPOSE'!

Rashi (on 3:12) deals with this difficulty by reinterpreting Moshe's question (in 3:11). When Moshe asks 'VE-CHI OTZI', he asks not HOW to take them out, but rather WHY am I (and/or Bnei Yisrael) WORTHY of being taken out of Egypt? To this God responds that AFTER they leave Egypt, Bnei Yisrael are to worship Him and receive the Torah on this mountain. This merit alone renders them worthy of Yetziat Mitzrayim. In other words, God here explains the PURPOSE of Yetziat Mitzrayim - that Bnei Yisrael will receive the Torah at Har Sinai!

RASHBAM - 'HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE'!

Unlike Rashi, Rashbam refuses to reinterpret the question. Instead, he reinterprets God's answer. He accomplishes this by

dividing God's answer into two parts, corresponding to both the two parts of God's original command & the two parts of Moshe's original question. The following table maps out this parallelism in psukim 3:10-12:

THE FIRST HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

3:10/ COMMAND: Go, I have sent you to Pharaoh!
3:11/ QUESTION: Who am I, that I can go to Pharaoh?
3:12/ ANSWER: For I will be with you, and this [the sneh] is the sign that I have SENT you...

THE SECOND HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

3:10/ COMMAND: Take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt!
3:11/ QUESTION: [HOW] can I take them out of Egypt?
3:12/ ANSWER: [In order to] take them out of Egypt, [tell Pharaoh that] this nation must worship their God on this mountain.

Rashbam's interpretation of 3:12 is very creative. He claims that Moshe asks (in 3:11) that even if he is allowed to speak to Pharaoh, HOW can he possibly convince Pharaoh to let them free? God answers Moshe by telling him to 'TRICK' PHARAOH - "Tell Pharaoh that you must take Bnei Yisrael [for a short time] out of Egypt, in order that they can worship their God on this mountain."

In other words, Rashbam claims that God instructs Moshe to 'deceive' Pharaoh requesting permission to worship God in the desert. Once they leave, Moshe will lead Bnei Yisrael to the Promised Land, where they will live forever, never again to return to Egypt!

Rashbam clearly reads into this pasuk much more than is written. In fact, Rashbam himself admits to doing so! However, he explains that he bases this interpretation on a later pasuk in this 'hitgalut' - where God issues more specific instructions to Moshe regarding his meeting with Pharaoh:

> "... Then you and the elders shall go to the King of Egypt and tell him: 'The God of the Hebrews had come and told us that we must go for a three-day journey into the desert [to Har Chorev] to offer sacrifices to our Lord'" (3:18).

As we explained in Part One, Rashbam's approach is based on the above analysis that Moshe never asks for freedom, rather for a journey of a three day distance to worship God in the desert. Considering that Moshe's true intention (as he tells Bnei Yisrael) is to take them to the Promised Land, the 'three day journey' request must be part of a 'master plan' to 'sneak' Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt.

Furthermore, the final phrase of 5:3: "lest he strike us with DEVER or CHEREV" - explains God's intention in 3:12. The plan is rather simple. Moshe warns Pharaoh that if he does not allow Bnei Yisrael to journey into the desert and worship their God, a severe Divine punishment will ensue and many people will die (including Egyptians).

As we explained above, a careful analysis of the entire Exodus narrative renders Rashbam's explanation that God commands Moshe to employ 'trickery' as the simple 'pshat'.

Even though we have referred to this plan as 'trickery', Rashbam does not call this 'lying' - he refers to it instead as 'derech chochma' - a wise scheme. He brings a parallel example from Sefer Shmuel. When God instructs Shmuel with the mission to anoint David as king, Shmuel expresses his fear that Shaul may find out and then kill him. To solve this problem, God provides Shmuel with a 'cover up', telling him to claim that he is going to Bet-Lechem to offer a public sacrifice. Once there, he will secretly anoint David as king. [See Shmuel I/16:1-3!]

When you read this Rashbam inside, note the 'confident' style with which he begins his explanation:

> "Anyone who would like to understand the primary 'pshat' of these psukim should study my interpretation of this pasuk, for those who explained it before me did not understand it at all!" [See Rashbam 3:11-12.]

Later on, Rashbam is so sure that his interpretation is correct that he concludes his commentary by stating:

> "Anyone who explains these psukim in any other manner is totally mistaken!" [See end of peirush to 3:11-12.]

'NOT SO FAST ...'

Despite the charm and appeal of Rashbam's explanation, there appears to be a major 'hole' in his theory. Let's explain:

Recall that, in addition to his mission to Pharaoh, Moshe's mission also included that he tell Bnei Yisrael that God had now come to take them out of Egypt to the Promised Land (see 3:16-17). And this is exactly what Moshe does in 4:29-31.

Is it possible to expect that over one million people know the 'real' plan, and Pharaoh won't find out? Can it be expected that no one will leak the story? Doesn't Pharaoh have his own CIA [KGB, Shin Bet... take your pick]?

Furthermore, it appears that Moshe has nothing to gain by not telling Pharaoh the whole truth? Either way, God tells Moshe that Pharaoh won't listen in any event (see 3:19), so why not tell Pharaoh the whole truth in the first place?

Finally, is God not powerful enough to bring plagues capable of forcing Pharaoh to grant Bnei Yisrael total freedom? Is it better to deceive Pharaoh rather than tell him the truth?

NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE

When we read the story of the Exodus, it is commonly assumed that the only obstacle preventing Bnei Yisrael's return to Eretz Canaan was their enslavement to Egypt. However, if we consider their condition more realistically, we realize that Bnei Yisrael had no alternative other than remain in Egypt. Let's explain why:

Bnei Yisrael's population is over two million. [The census included 600,000 men over the age of twenty. Figure an equal amount of women, and considering the high birth rate figure as many children under twenty as adults over twenty, and you arrive at a figure of about two million!]

To provide food and water for this size population is not an easy task. Egypt, thanks to the Nile River and Nile Delta, could provide their needs. However, survival of a nation of this size in desert conditions, even for a few weeks, would be impossible.

Even if Pharaoh had granted them permission to emigrate, could a nation of some two million people [ex-slaves] survive the lengthy, arduous journey through the desert? And even if they could make it to Canaan, could they conquer the land with its walled cities and formidable, armed enemies? As the 'meraglim' themselves concluded, such a plan would be suicidal - and that's a conclusion reached by people who had witnessed the miracles of Yetziat Mitzrayim! [See Bamidbar chapters 13->14.]

Without anything less than a 'miracle', Bnei Yisrael have no option other than to remain in Eretz Mitzrayim.

Furthermore, Bnei Yisrael had been living in Egypt for (at least) the last two hundred years. Certainly, in the eyes of the Egyptians (and most likely in their own eyes), even though they may be 'third class citizens', they remain a distinct ethnic group within Egyptian society and culture.

In fact, it is for this very reason that their enslavement begins when Bnei Yisrael become so numerous. Egypt fears that they may soon take over! Many dynasties in Egypt had been taken over by enemies from within or by foreign powers. They now fear that Bnei Yisrael may soon become powerful enough to take over their own country or help others do so (see 1:8-10).

Thus, despite the hardships of their enslavement, [without some sort of miraculous, divine intervention] Bnei Yisrael had no realistic alternative other than staying in Egypt. When Bnei Yisrael cry out for salvation in 2:23-25, they are an oppressed working class who desire a lighter workload and better living conditions; they are NOT yearning for Zion.

With this in mind, let's imagine what would have happened had Moshe presented Pharaoh with this plan of an en-masse emigration to Eretz Canaan. Pharaoh most probably would have dismissed him as insane! Moshe would have lost all credibility in the eyes of Pharaoh as a responsible leader of the Hebrew

Nation. Instead, God instructs Moshe to make a fairly reasonable request - to allow his afflicted brethren to worship their God. Moshe does not lie to Pharaoh, nor does he deceive him. He simply claims the legitimate right of religious freedom for an oppressed people!

Furthermore, God can demand that Pharaoh grant religious freedom to an oppressed people, and hence punish him for not obeying; but He can't expect Pharaoh to act as 'an ardent supporter of Zionism' - allowing an entire nation to embark on a journey that would most certainly be suicidal!

Hence, there would no point for Moshe to demand that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael to emigrate. Instead, he demands that Pharaoh allow Bnei Yisrael the right to worship their God in the desert. This is not a lie, for this is exactly where Bnei Yisrael first plan to go (to Har Sinai), and there they will offer korbanot (see Shmot 24:4-11).

This explains why Pharaoh never accuses Moshe (during the Plagues) that he may really be planning to take Bnei Yisrael to Eretz Canaan, for Pharaoh never considers this a realistic option!

So what is Pharaoh worried about? Why is he so adamant not to allow them to worship their God in the desert for a few days?

The answer is quite simple, and it explains every problem that we have raised thus far.

Pharaoh has ONE fear, and only one fear: From the time that the enslavement began until the day of the Exodus, Pharaoh's only fear is that Bnei Yisrael may take-over his country. That is exactly why he enslaved them in the first place (see 1:8-10), and this is exactly why he is reluctant to allow the entire nation to leave with all their belongings.

Pharaoh fears that should he let them free to worship their God, they will take advantage of the situation, and instead of returning to slavery, they will return and rebel; or join with other nations and attack. By not allowing them to travel too far, and by leaving their women and children (or at least cattle) behind, Pharaoh remains with a clear advantage. But should the entire nation leave to worship their God, nothing guarantees that Bnei Yisrael will return to their servitude. Instead, they could take advantage of the situation and declare their independence when they return to Egypt, or possibly even attack Egypt.

And when Bnei Yisrael finally did leave Egypt, what Pharaoh feared most is exactly what happened. Bnei Yisrael DON'T go to the desert. Instead they march away 'armed' (see 13:18), with all of their own possessions, and with a significant amount of 'borrowed' Egyptian gold and silver - everything they need to declare independence! As soon as Pharaoh realizes that they are not going to the desert, he concludes that he has a rebellion on hand, and he launches a pre-emptive strike before they attack him (see 14:1-6).

With this in mind, we can suggest an answer to our other questions as well.

KEEPING A SECRET

Even though Moshe had told Bnei Yisrael of God's promise to take them to Eretz Canaan, had the Egyptians heard this 'rumor', they would have scoffed at the very thought. Could a multitude of slaves possibly organize themselves into an independent nation? Could they survive the journey through the desert? Could they conquer the kings of Canaan? Are there any neighboring lands as good as Egypt?

No one was keeping any secrets. Even the majority of Bnei Yisrael felt that this idea would lead to national suicide (see 14:12!). Why should the Egyptians believe this 'rumor' any more than Bnei Yisrael did? Throughout Sefer Shmot and Sefer Bamidbar, we find the people time and time again expressing their desire to return to Egypt. As the "meraglim" (spies) themselves later conclude, it is the only logical alternative (see Bamidbar 14:1-4).

Although God's promise of a land 'flowing with milk and honey' (see 3:8,17) was originally endorsed by the elders (see 4:29-31), only a short while later, after their workload was doubled, these hopes fizzled out (see 5:1-21).

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In addition to our explanation that God has no intention to fool Pharaoh, one could even suggest that there is a certain thematic value in the fact that Moshe's request from Pharaoh is specifically for 'religious freedom' and not the right to emigrate.

The story of the Exodus, and hence God mission to Moshe at the ‘sneh’, focuses on two independent issues:
1) To redeem Bnei Yisrael from Egypt - to fulfill Brit Avot;
2) To 'teach' Pharaoh and his country the lesson of 'ANI HASHEM' - that God of Israel exists.

In His 'hitgalut' to Moshe at the 'sneh', God charges Moshe with the responsibility of dealing with both issues.

Let's begin with the latter by asking a more basic question: why must Moshe confront Pharaoh in the first place? If the entire purpose of Yetziat Mitzrayim is simply to fulfill 'brit Avot' and take Bnei Yisrael to Eretz Canaan, why involve Egypt in this process at all? Surely God could create circumstances whereby Bnei Yisrael would emigrate without official Egyptian authorization. For example, let God cause a sudden change in Egyptian policy, or make just one miracle where all the Egyptians would fall asleep for 48 hours, etc.

[See Ramban on 3:13 for an interesting perspective.]

Nonetheless, at the ‘sneh’ we see how God insists that Bnei Yisrael must receive Pharaoh's permission to leave. Note how the psukim emphasize this point:

"Now go, I have sent you to PHARAOH..." (3:10)
and Moshe responds:
"Who am I that I should go to PHARAOH?..." (3:11).

Moshe's confrontation with Pharaoh constitutes a critical element of God's plan. God does not tell Moshe to 'trick' Pharaoh. Rather, Moshe must confront Pharaoh over the fundamental issue of religious freedom - the basic right of any people, especially an oppressed nation, to worship God. The fact that Pharaoh, the king of Egypt - the world superpower and center of ancient civilization - rejects this request shows that he considers himself above his fellow man. He acts as though he himself is a god; God must therefore teach him (and any future Pharaoh/monarch) the lesson of "ve-yad'u Mitzrayim ki ANI Hashem" (see 7:5,9:16,11:9,14:4).

[One could suggest that the natural resources of Egypt, especially the inestimable Nile river, granted power to the Egyptian people. [See Yechezkel 29:1-3.] This power not only allowed their monarch to claim divine power and authority, but also led Egypt to their self-proclaimed privilege to oppress other nations - to act as though they were gods. It is not by chance that the first plague strikes specifically the Nile River.]

TWO PERSPECTIVES

Therefore, from a universalistic perspective, the primary goal of Yetziat Mitzraim is that Egypt - the center of ancient civilization - realize that God is above all Man - "ve-yad'u Mitzraim ki Ani Hashem." Moshe must deliver this message to the Egyptian people, in God's Name, directly to Pharaoh (as explained in 3:10-12, 18-20). The MAKKOT ensure that the Egyptians will ultimately internalize this message.

Hence, when Moshe is commanded to go to Pharaoh and demand Bnei Yisrael's right to worship their God, it's not a 'trick', but rather a basic, human demand.

On the other hand, from Am Yisrael's perspective, the central purpose of Yetziat Mitzraim relates to the fulfillment of God's covenant with the Avot, that Bnei Yisrael return to Eretz Canaan in order to become God's special nation. As Bnei Yisrael must prepare themselves for this redemption (as we will explain in next week's shiur), Moshe must convey this message to them (see 3:7-9, 13-17). Ultimately, this redemption will take place in wake

of the events that unfold once Pharaoh allows Bnei Yisrael to leave after the Ten Plagues.

FROM MAKKOT TO DIBROT

In conclusion, it is interesting to note the inter-relationship between these two aspects of the Exodus.

As we explained in Sefer Breishit, an ultimate goal of the Nation of Israel is to establish a model society that can bring all mankind to recognize God. At Yetziat Mitzrayim - when Israel becomes a nation - it is significant that Egypt - the center of ancient civilization and the epitome of a society that rejects God - must recognize God, specifically at the moment when Am Yisrael becomes a nation.

Initially (and unfortunately), this goal must first be achieved through force, by Moshe's MATEH and God's TEN Plagues. Ultimately, when Israel becomes a nation in its own land, this very same goal can be achieved in a more 'peaceful' manner - i.e. through education - should Bnei Yisrael integrate the message of Moshe's DIBUR and the principles of God's TEN Commandments.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Hashem's Response to Moshe's question - 3:12

Before presenting the various approaches taken to this pasuk let us first identify the various problems that immediately arise. The pasuk reads, "He said, I will be with you, and this shall be a sign that I have sent you, when you free the nation from Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain." The mefarshim must grapple with the following questions:

Most urgently, as we discuss in the shiur, is the issue as to how Hashem here responds to the concerns Moshe expresses in 3:11: "Who am I, that I can go to Pharaoh and that I can take Bnei Yisrael from Egypt?"

To what does 'this' refer in the phrase, "this shall be a sign that I have sent you"? Does it refer to the immediately preceding clause - "I will be with you," that somehow Hashem's "being with" Moshe serves as a sign? Or does it refer to the immediately following clause, the nation's serving Hashem at this mountain after leaving Egypt? How could Matan Torah serve as a sign that "I have sent you"? Significantly, an 'etnachta', signifying a pause in the sentence, appears under the word, 'shlachticha" ('that I have sent you'), perhaps suggesting that the 'sign' refers to what was mentioned earlier, rather than that which follows the 'etnachta'.

Why does Moshe need a sign that Hashem sent him; did he ever express any doubt that it was God who spoke to him? He doubted only his ability to speak to Pharaoh and demand the release of the slaves.

A question that necessarily relates to the previous questions: what does Matan Torah have to do with Yetziat Mitzrayim? Why does Hashem mention it here to Moshe?

It is important to bear all these questions in mind when surveying the various interpretations. This will help us appreciate what prompted each mefaresh to explain as he did.

In the shiur we accept the Rashbam's interpretation of the pasuk, that Hashem responds to Moshe's concerns by telling him that a) He will ensure Moshe's permission to come before Pharaoh and b) he would free Bnei Yisrael by 'fooling' Pharaoh into thinking that he requests merely permission for a three-day trek into the wilderness to worship Hashem.

Here is a brief survey of some other explanations offered:

A. Rashi, first interpretation: The burning bush serves as a sign to Moshe that he will succeed, since "I have sent you". Just as the bush was not consumed by the fire in compliance with Hashem's will, so will Moshe succeed because he performs Hashem's mission, which can never fail. The second half of the pasuk refers to a second question that Moshe had asked: in what merit Bnei Yisrael will be freed? Hashem responds that He will redeem them in the merit of their eventual assembly at that mountain for Matan Torah.

B. Rashi, second interpretation: The clause, "this is the sign that I have sent you…" bears no connection to the first part of the pasuk. Hashem 'parenthetically' informs Moshe that his success in freeing Bnei Yisrael will serve as a sign of the fulfillment of a different promise - Matan Torah.

C. Ibn Ezra (Peirush Ha-katzar) cites an approach that completely separates the two halves of the pasuk, before and after the etnachta. That is, "when you leave Egypt you will serve God" is merely additional information that does not address Moshe's concern. Within this approach, Ibn Ezra cites two versions. According to the Geonim, Hashem's 'being with Moshe' will serve as a sign, while the anonymous 'acheirim' view the miracle of the burning bush as the sign (recall Rashi's first interpretation). Either way, it seems, these phenomena serve as a sign "that I have sent you." As Ibn Ezra notes, however, Moshe never doubted Hashem's having sent him (as noted earlier). Additionally, we should add, this approach leaves unresolved the question as to why Hashem makes mention of Matan Torah in this context.

D. Ibn Ezra himself (in his Peirush Ha-katzar) suggests a somewhat revolutionary pshat, claiming (though somewhat cryptically) that the word 'ot', generally translated as 'sign', here means 'purpose'. Hashem thus informs Moshe that the purpose of His taking Bnei Yisrael from Egypt is for them to stand at Har Sinai and receive the Torah. Ibn Ezra does not explain why Hashem suddenly mentions this now, rather than when He initially instructed Moshe to go to Pharaoh.

E. Ramban understands the reference to Matan Torah as Hashem's assurance to Moshe that Bnei Yisrael will agree to go to Canaan. Moshe was concerned that the people would refuse to go in fear of the nations they would have to fight upon entering the land. Hashem thus tells Moshe that the nation will first worship Him on that mountain, and there they will accept the mitzvot and Moshe as their leader. They will then follow him to Canaan. (One version of the Seforno's commentary on our pasuk has him adopting this explanation - see footnotes on the Seforno in the Torat Chayim Chumash.) Although Ramban does not make it clear how this serves as a 'sign', he likely refers to Rambam's reading of this pasuk, as he explains in Hilchot Yesodei Ha-Torah 8:6. Ramban there writes that Matan Torah served to firmly establish Bnei Yisrael's faith in Moshe as Hashem's prophet. Thus, it serves as a 'sign' to Bnei Yisrael "that I have sent you".

F. Seforno explains the opening phrase, "I will be with you," as meaning that Hashem will guarantee the fulfillment of every one of Moshe's predictions. This will serve as a sign to one and all - Bnei Yisrael and the Egyptians - that Hashem has sent Moshe to free the slaves. As for the mention of Matan Torah, Seforno follows Rashi's approach, that Hashem here informs Moshe that the merit of Matan Torah renders Bnei Yisrael worthy of redemption.

G. Abarbanel - first approach: Like one view mentioned earlier, this approach identifies the burning bush as the sign. It serves as a sign to Moshe that Hashem will assist him in his meetings with Pharaoh. In this approach, Abarbanel suggests two possible explanations of the second half of the pasuk: the Ramban's explanation, that Matan Torah will give Bnei Yisrael the confidence and hence the willingness to go to Canaan, and Rashi's interpretation, that Matan Torah renders them worthy of deliverance from Egypt. (Abarbanel expresses his preference for this first approach.)

H. Abarbanel - second approach: The prophecy Moshe now received serves as sign for him that God will accompany him to Pharaoh such that he will succeed. The mention of Matan Torah responds to another question of Moshe, which he expressed when said, "… and that I will take Bnei Yisrael out from Egypt." Moshe here asks the question that, as we discuss in the shiur, many among Bnei Yisrael probably asked: why must they leave Egypt at all? Why can't Hashem simply free them from bondage without taking them from Egypt? To this Hashem responds that they must serve Him, and this worship cannot take place in Egypt, given the widespread idol worship in the country; Moshe must therefore take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt to worship Hashem in the wilderness.

I. Abarbanel - third approach: Moshe had questioned his ability to undertake this mission on the basis of his lowly stature. Hashem responded that He will accompany Moshe, and his lowly stature will itself serve as a sign to Hashem's having sent him; a simple, old man could not defy Pharaoh and lead a multitude out of Egypt without Hashem's help. For this very reason, Bnei Yisrael will serve Hashem after leaving Egypt, rather than worship Moshe himself, as they will clearly recognize the Almighty's hand in this process.

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We should note that all these approaches give rise to the problem of "ikar chaser min ha-sefer", that Hashem seems to have omitted the primary component of His message to Moshe in this pasuk. This is characteristic of very difficult and ambiguous psukim. Since the pasuk makes little sense as written, the mefarshim have no choice but to read external information into the text in order to make it comprehensible.

Parshat Shemot: Slavery's Racist Roots

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION FOR PARASHAT SHEMOT:

1. A NEW SEFER: Sefer Shemot (Exodus) opens up with familiar names: the names of the sons of Ya'akov, personalities to whom we know we can look for leadership. We seem to be on firm ground despite having just begun a new sefer (book). We expect things to continue as before. But this sense of familiarity quickly evaporates as we encounter the new realities of Sefer Shemot. In what ways does the opening of Sefer Shemot present unfamiliar territory? What is missing from Bnei Yisrael's new reality? The answer to this question -- and the appearance of what is missing -- are primary themes of Parashat Shemot.

2. LEADERSHIP: Our discussions of Sefer Bereishit (Genesis) focused heavily on themes of leadership. Our discussions of Sefer Shemot, VaYikra (Leviticus), BeMidbar (Numbers), and Devarim (Deuteronomy) will also focus on leadership, as the career and personality of Moshe and other leaders offer great opportunities for insight. As each leader steps onto the scene, pay careful attention to his or her leadership style; ask yourself what leadership means in each context. Although many of us may think of leadership as a combination of charisma, power, "personal magnetism," and other buzzwords, we will see that leadership comes in many different flavors. If you do not consider yourself "charismatic, powerful, personally magnetic," etc. and you are asking yourself what leadership has to do with you, keep in mind that one of our goals is to think about different models of leadership and how our own characteristics and gifts offer us different leadership opportunities.

3. MOSHE:

a) The Torah tells us very little about the early life of Avraham. Instead, he appears somewhat suddenly on the scene as a prophet commanded and tested by Hashem. In contrast, the Torah provides plenty of detail about Moshe's birth, his early adventures in the Nile, his adoption by Paro's daughter, his trouble with informers, and many other details. Why does the Torah introduce Moshe to us in such detail?

b) Hashem commands Moshe to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, but Moshe seems very reluctant to do the job, as the Torah reports in great detail. What does this tell us about Moshe?

4. THE DIVINE PLAN: Why does Hashem command Moshe to demand that Paro release Bnei Yisrael for a trek into the desert to serve the Hebrew God, "Y-HVH" if He knows that Paro will only refuse and cruelly increase his demands of the Jewish slaves, making Moshe the target of Jewish anger?

PARASHAT SHEMOT:

AND THEY ALL DIED:

Sefer Shemot (Exodus) opens up with familiar names: the names of the sons of Ya'akov, personalities to whom we know we can look for leadership. We seem to be on firm ground despite having just begun a new sefer, and it seems that things will continue as before. Many mefarshim (commentators) offer various explanations for why the names of the sons of Ya'akov appear here, since they have recently been listed at the end of Sefer Bereishit (in Parashat VaYigash). But from a literary perspective, the names may appear here simply to establish Sefer Shemot as a literary entity independent of Sefer Bereishit. The "unnecessary" review of the names signals the distinctiveness of this book from the previous one (see Bekhor Shor; Abravanel and others offer examples from other books in Tanakh which open up with information we already know from previous books). But a look at the list of Ya'akov's sons provides what may be a more satisfying answer: the Torah lists the sons of Ya'akov again to tell us that they are dead!

SHEMOT 1:1-7 --

These are the names of the sons of Yisrael who came to Egypt: Ya'akov, the man and his household, came: Re'uvein, Shimon, Leivi, and Yehuda, Yissakhar, Zevulun, and Binyamin, Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher. All of the souls who came from the loins of Ya'akov were seventy souls; Yosef was [already] in Egypt. Yosef and all of his brothers died, and all of

that generation [died]. Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, and swarmed, and increased, and became very, very mighty; the land was full of them.

First the Torah lists the sons of Ya'akov, followed by a summary of the total number of people who came to Egypt as part of Ya'akov's household -- seventy people. The situation sounds as if it is under control: the whole group is only seventy people, and leadership for the group is amply provided by the sons of Ya'akov, who, as we know from VaYeishev, Mikkeitz, VaYigash, and VaYhi, include such capable leaders as Yosef and Yehuda. But the Torah quickly takes away this feeling of security by suddenly reporting two facts (I say "suddenly" because it is clear that these events take much longer to occur than their brief treatment in the Torah conveys):

1) Yosef, all of his brothers, and all of his generation are dead. In other words, all of the people we had been "depending on" for leadership, the mention of whose names had lulled us into believing for a moment that they were still here to lead, are gone. The family of seventy is left without a leader and no one appears to fill that vacuum. A crisis of leadership is brewing.

2) Bnei Yisrael (and here, ironically, the Torah uses the same phrase -- "Bnei Yisrael" -- to refer to both the twelve sons of Ya'akov and, only several lines later, to the thousands of their descendants who "swarm" and "fill the land") are no longer a family group of seventy people. They have grown to immense proportions. The Torah uses four different "growth" verbs to emphasize how quickly they grow and to what great proportions; the land literally "swarms" with them. This makes the lack of visible leadership even more worrisome: there is no comparison between the needs for leadership of a group of seventy people, and the needs for leadership of 600,000 people -- approximately the number of adult males who eventually leave Egypt.

A BREWING CRISIS:

The Torah may be trying to communicate that with the death of the older generation and the explosive growth of Bnei Yisrael, a crisis of leadership is brewing: Who will represent Bnei Yisrael to the Egyptians, now that Yosef is gone? Who will organize them so that they can stand up for themselves, train them to defend themselves, provide spiritual leadership so they can maintain the monotheistic beliefs of the Avot in the midst of pagan Egypt? How will they preserve the moral values of the Avot if they do not remain distinct from the surrounding culture? Finally, despite the emphasis placed by Ya'akov and Yosef (just before their deaths, as we discussed on Parashat VaYhi) on the family's connection to Eretz Yisrael and their repeated assertion that Hashem will return the family to Eretz Yisrael, how will the people maintain an emotional connection to the land and not become comfortable and complacent in fertile Egypt?

To see how effective the leaders and educators of Bnei Yisrael are in Egypt in perpetuating the values and beliefs passed down by the Avot, see Yehezkel 20:5-10 for the dismal report.

OMINOUS SIGNS:

One reason leadership is particularly necessary is because Egypt is not a friendly place for Bnei Yisrael. The roots of latent Egyptian hostility are struck well before Paro commands that Bnei Yisrael be enslaved:

1) The stories of Yosef and his brothers showed that the Egyptians, despite their need for Yosef as architect and executor of their national survival program in the seven-year famine, maintain racist and cultural prejudices against Bnei Yisrael:

a) They consider it "an abomination" to eat with Yosef, or with Ya'akov's other sons (Bereishit 43:32).

b) They look upon the raising of sheep, the occupation of Avraham, Yitzhak, Ya'akov, and all of Ya'akov's sons, also as "an abomination" (Bereishit 46:34).

c) Despite Yosef's status as second to the king, he must humbly request permission of Paro to leave Egypt to bury his father in Eretz Cana'an (Bereishit 50:4). Some mefarshim point out that one of the reasons Ya'akov asks Yosef to *swear* to bury him in Eretz Cana'an is because he anticipates that Paro will refuse to let Yosef meet this commitment to his father unless Yosef has *sworn* to uphold it. Indeed, in requesting permission to leave, Yosef says that he is sworn to follow his father's wishes, hinting that he may fear that if not for the strength of his commitment, Paro would not grant permission. Most telling of all, Yosef seems unable to speak directly to Paro, and sends his request as a message, humbly worded, to be delivered to Paro.

Any group, under any conditions, needs leadership. But in an unfriendly and uncertain environment, leadership is especially critical. People must have someone to look to for hope and guidance, someone to focus their energies and help them accomplish their goals -- and, when necessary, force them to face realities they would rather ignore. Yosef and his brothers are dead; the family of seventy has grown into a group the size of a nation. And the situation is about to get worse.

WHO'S AT THE HELM?

This vacuum of leadership is part of what enables Paro and his people to subjugate Bnei Yisrael. Paro himself testifies that Bnei Yisrael have become more numerous than his own people, that he fears that their strength threatens Egypt. We might have expected Paro to try to reach an agreement or treaty of some sort with Bnei Yisrael, as previous leaders (like Avimelekh) had done once they recognized the power in (or behind) Bnei Yisrael. But Paro is able to completely take advantage of Bnei Yisrael despite their strength. Among other causes, this weakness points to a lack of leadership. Even a powerful group is defenseless without leadership to direct its power and channel its energies. If leadership is not provided from within, by the appearance of a leader from among Bnei Yisrael, then leadership will be provided from without -- by a Paro, who will take advantage of the strength of the people for his own purposes.

EGYPTIAN FEARS:

What are Paro's "purposes?" Why does he come up with the idea of making Bnei Yisrael suffer in various cruel ways?

SHEMOT 1: 8-10 --
A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. He said to his nation, "The nation of Bnei Yisrael is many, and more powerful than we are. Let us 'wise up' about him, lest he increase, and then, when a war breaks out, he will join our enemies, fight us, and go up out of the land!"

Paro seems to fear that Bnei Yisrael will leave Egypt and go wherever they choose (see Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Abravanel). Why? What does Egypt have invested in Bnei Yisrael's remaining where they are?

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY?

Although this new king does not remember Yosef, Egypt became dependent on Yosef long ago to save it from starvation. This established a relationship which Yosef himself became confined by: when he wanted to leave to bury Ya'akov, he had to ask Paro for permission (and obsequiously, at that). We usually assume that, once released from jail to interpret Paro's dreams, Yosef gains his freedom and has the power of the king, for all practical purposes. But it seems that he never gains complete freedom; one price of his being an indispensable asset to Egypt is that Paro keeps him under close watch and restricts his movements. Paro's attitude toward Yosef may have trickled down and become the prevalent Egyptian attitude toward Bnei Yisrael.

One other hint of the economic dependency of Egypt on Bnei Yisrael appears in Parashat VaYigash: when Yosef's brothers come down to Egypt with their father, Paro welcomes them. Knowing that the Egyptians consider shepherding an abomination, Yosef carefully prepares his brothers to let Paro know that they are shepherds. He suggests to Paro that his family live in the area of Goshen, not only because the area is well-suited for sheep, but also in order to achieve some seclusion from the Egyptian populace, who would object to their shepherding. Paro not only agrees to this arrangement, but also requests that Yosef find out if his brothers are good shepherds, and if so, to have them take care of his sheep as well! The Torah does not tell us whether Bnei Yisrael become the shepherds of the royal flock, but this remains a possibility. (If so, we have a pattern repeated here: Paro is unwilling to let Bnei Yisrael leave in the same way that Lavan was unwilling to let Ya'akov leave. Both Lavan and Paro see their flocks increasing under the care of this family and know that if Ya'akov/Bnei Yisrael leave, their success will come to an end.) Jewish history has provided plenty of examples of forced expulsion of Jews when religious or economic motives come into play. It stands to reason that when Jews are seen as essential to the economy, they may be forced *not* to leave.

AN INFERIOR PEOPLE:

Rashbam (and perhaps Abravanel and other mefarshim) implies that even before the Egyptians officially enslave Bnei Yisrael, they already look at Bnei Yisrael as either cheap labor or a potential source of slave labor. The Egyptians fear that

this source of labor may one day develop feelings of independence and decide to leave Egypt. That the Egyptians look at Bnei Yisrael as potential slaves fits well with the hints we have mentioned that the Egyptians consider Bnei Yisrael a lower class: they refuse to share a table with members of Bnei Yisrael and consider Bnei Yisrael's traditional and current occupation an abomination.

Seforno (1:8) develops this theme further, suggesting that even though Yosef's deeds have certainly been written in the official Egyptian royal history, the new king refuses to *believe* that someone as capable as Yosef could have been part of the nation he sees before him now. Seforno adds (1:10) that part of what convinces Paro that Bnei Yisrael is the enemy are some of the elements which have faithfully fed antisemitism over the millennia: Bnei Yisrael have different customs (e.g., circumcision), a different language, and a different culture and value system. This, Seforno says, is behind the Egyptian refusal to break bread with Bnei Yisrael. Paro is not merely a leader facing a threatening group, he an antisemitic leader of an antisemitic society determined to maintain its source of cheap labor and determined to defend itself against the alien 'inferiors' whose number and strength have begun to worry him.

DEHUMANIZATION: INSECTS AND VERMIN

Several other hints complete the picture: the Torah uses the word **"va-yishretzu"** to describe the great increase in Bnei Yisrael's population. The word "sheretz," which in the Torah refers to swarming, rodent-like, creeping-crawling creatures, is hardly the word we would choose to describe our own growth! In all of the places "sheretz" appears in Tanakh -- 29 places, to my knowledge -- "sheretz" refers to people in only ONE other place (Bereshit 9:7). In every other context, "sheretz" is a swarming or creeping animal; for example, "All swarming creatures [sheretz] which swarm on the ground are disgusting; they are not to be eaten" (VaYikra 11:41).

If you wanted to describe a couple blessed with many children, you would not say, "They breed like rabbits!" or "They swarm like cockroaches!" unless you meant to be disrespectful and dehumanizing. And, shockingly, the frogs which are to swarm over Egypt in just a little while are described using the SAME WORD the Torah uses to describe the growth of Bnei Yisrael (from the perspective of the Egyptians): "The river shall swarm ["sharatz"] with frogs; they will come up into your house, your bedroom, on your bed, in the house of your servant, among your people, in your ovens and in your baking-pans" (Shemot 7:28; see also Tehillim 105:30, which uses the same word to describe the plague). By describing Bnei Yisrael's growth in this way, the Torah is telling us that the Egyptians, frightened by Bnei Yisrael's explosive fertility and already accustomed to looking at Bnei Yisrael as a lower, alien class, feel threatened by their "swarming," rodent-like multiplication.

And it is no accident that just after describing Bnei Yisrael as experiencing such growth, the Torah reports that "the *land* was full of them" -- for a "sheretz" is (usually) a creature of the ground, as the above-quoted pasuk (verse) from VaYikra confirms. The Egyptians see Bnei Yisrael as a population of useful creatures -- but who are growing to epidemic proportions. The "obvious" solution: strictly enforced population control.

No Jew living in (or after) the twentieth century needs to be reminded that there is barely a hair's-breadth between merely *thinking* of a group of people as essentially inferior and actually *treating* the members of such a group as subhumans. If one wanted to convince a group of economically productive people to stay in the area, one would offer them attractive incentives; but if one wanted to get a *monkey* to stay in one's area, one would simply put him in a cage. It is only because the Egyptians think of Bnei Yisrael as sub-Egyptian that they are able to enslave and murder them.

POPULATION CONTROL BEGINS:

The Egyptians begin by imposing a human tax (what is usually referred to in Tanakh as "mas oved") on Bnei Yisrael, demanding that the people perform physical labor -- building -- for them. This alone is not unusually cruel; many kings forced subjugated peoples to provide a set number of laborers for work, and many kings even demanded that their own people provide laborers for work required by the kingdom (including Shlomo HaMelekh! See I Melakhim 5:27). But the work imposed by Egypt is not to serve constructive national needs, but to erase any potential dreams of freedom by making it so difficult for the people to make it from day to day that no one will be able to raise his eyes above the struggle and develop a vision of freedom and independence. More practically, no one will have the energy to continue having children. When this strategy does not work -- "As much as they oppressed them, so did they increase and expand . . ." (1:12) -- the Egyptians turn to harsher measures. True enslavement begins with a vengeance, as the Egyptians force Bnei Yisrael into harsh slave labor.

When this too fails to control Bnei Yisrael's growth (see Ibn Ezra 1:13), Paro turns to more direct methods: he instructs the midwives to kill all baby boys. This brings us back to the theme of leadership: Rashi (1:16) explains that Paro cares about killing only the boys because his astrologers have told him that a leader is to be born to Bnei Yisrael who will eventually lead them to salvation. Since Paro assumes that such a leader can only be a man, he must kill all of the boys. But it doesn't take astrologers to know that a nation which suffers from a lack of leadership might become much more powerful if a leader appears! Paro knows that in order to control Bnei Yisrael, he must 1) reduce their population and 2) prevent them from developing leadership. As we said above, it is largely because of a lack of strong leadership that Paro is able to enslave and kill as he pleases. Paro is aware of this and knows that in order to maintain his latitude, he must extinguish any flickerings of leadership and independence which appear.

JUST LIKE ANIMALS:

Then a strange event takes place: Paro finds out that the midwives have not been carrying out his orders to kill all baby boys. He summons them and demands an explanation. The midwives respond with what seems a flimsy excuse:

SHEMOT 1:19 --

The midwives said to Paro, "The women of Bnei Yisrael ["Ivriyyot"] are not like Egyptian women -- they are "HAYYOT." Before the midwife can get to them, they have already given birth!"

The mefarshim debate the meaning of the word "hayyot." Hazal (Sota 11a), Rashi, and Abravanel take it quite literally and explain that the midwives mean that the women of Bnei Yisrael are like animals, which give birth without the aid of midwives. Some mefarshim suggest that "hayyot" means "energetic" or "quick"; others suggest that it means "midwives" (as it does in Hullin 4:3) -- the women who give birth are skilled as midwives themselves, so they do not summon the official midwives for help. Unless we accept that "hayyot" means midwives, which seems unlikely since this word is not usually used to mean "midwives" in Tanakh, how could the midwives hope to satisfy Paro with the explanation that the women of Bnei Yisrael are either "animals" (Hazal) or "quick at giving birth"? Why would Paro believe that these women are different than other women?

Rabbi Dan Jacobson (a friend of mine) suggested that Paro's willingness to accept this explanation is one more manifestation of the Egyptian view of Bnei Yisrael as inherently inferior. Paro is not surprised to hear that the women of Bnei Yisrael are "hayyot," "animals," and that they therefore give birth without the aid of midwives; this merely confirms his deeply held beliefs about Bnei Yisrael's inferiority. These people, "swarmers" who "fill the land," not only reproduce in the numbers that the lower animals do, they even give birth as lower animals do. They are simply uncivilized, and do not require trained medical assistance, as the more refined and complex Egyptian women do.

If "hayyot" means "energetic" or "quick" (as some mefarshim suggest), Paro is again not surprised to hear that there is a biological difference between the women of his nation and those of Bnei Yisrael. "Scientists" of Nazi Germany expended much effort and research "discovering" ways in which the Jew was biologically (not just culturally or psychologically) different than the Aryan. This was important because part of dehumanizing the Jew was "proving" that he was of a different race than the Aryan. Once this had been "proven," it could be easily "demonstrated" that the Aryan was superior in every way and that the Jew was not truly human.

A NATION OF KILLERS:

Until now, only the midwives had been instructed to carry out Paro's "population control" scheme. Paro's final step, once he sees that they cannot help him, is to bring his entire nation into the effort to put Bnei Yisrael in their place:

SHEMOT 1:22 --
Paro commanded his entire people, saying: "Any boy who is born -- throw him into the river! Any girl -- let her live."

Lest we imagine that only Paro and a small group of bloodthirsty maniacs are responsible for murdering the babies of Bnei Yisrael, the Torah makes it clear that the entire nation is not only complicit, but actively involved in the murders. I hate to belabor the point -- especially a point this painful and horrifying -- but anyone who has trouble imagining how "normal" people could drown newborn, helpless babies in the Nile need only look back fifty years and witness how "normal," highly cultured Germans murdered Jews of all ages in terrifyingly horrible ways with customary German efficiency.

"RIGHTEOUS GENTILES":

One other fascinating parallel to the Holocaust is worth mentioning at this point: the Holocaust produced some heroes, "righteous gentiles" who protested against the madness by saving Jews when they could, often at enormous personal risk. Abravanel claims that the midwives discussed above were indeed "righteous gentiles" -- that in fact, they were not midwives from among Bnei Yisrael, but Egyptian midwives who had been assigned to Bnei Yisrael (Abravanel interprets "me-yaldot ha-ivriyyot" to mean "the midwives *of* Bnei Yisrael," not "the Israelite midwives"; he supports this by asserting that Paro would never have trusted members of Bnei Yisrael to kill babies of their own nation) and who flouted Paro's orders to kill the baby boys because, as the Torah says, "they feared Hashem."

One other "righteous gentile" also appears in our parasha: Paro's daughter, who finds Moshe floating in a box in the Nile, realizes he is a child of Bnei Yisrael, and nevertheless adopts him. This brings us to the next major unit of Parashat Shemot: the appearance of Moshe Rabbeinu.

A LEADER APPEARS:

Parashat Shemot begins by stressing the lack of strong leadership which plagues (no pun intended) Bnei Yisrael. But the second half of the parasha fills the vacuum with the birth, initiation, and first acts of leadership of Moshe Rabbeinu. We will focus on Moshe Rabbeinu in next week's shiur.

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Shemos: The Selection of Mosheh

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. WHY MOSHEH?

In Parashat Sh'mot we are introduced to the central personality of the Humash - Mosheh Rabbenu. Mosheh's position as consummate leader and foremost prophet (Av laN'vi'im) is unrivaled, unchallenged and unquestioned within our tradition. What we are not told - at least not explicitly - is why Mosheh (if that is his real name - see Sh'mot Rabbah 1:20) was selected to lead the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt, to Sinai and (ideally) into the Land. In this shiur, we will attempt to find textual clues to explain the reason for his selection as Eved Hashem (the servant of God) at this critical point in our history.

WHY THE REPETITION?

Let's begin with another question, addressed by some of the Rishonim: The Torah listed the names of all of the members of Ya'akov's household who descended to Egypt (B'resheet 46:10-27). Why does our new Humash - Sh'mot - begin with a partial recount of those names (1:1-4)?

Rashi responds that this demonstrates God's love for His children, that he counts them during their lives and, again, after their deaths. As Ramban points out, this is a profound piece of homiletics which reflects the special relationship that Ya'akov's family has with God - but it isn't the p'shat(straightforward) explanation of the repetition. (Perhaps Ramban was bothered by the extensive list in B'resheet as opposed to the brief list in Sh'mot).

Ramban explains that the theme of Sefer Sh'mot is G'ulah - redemption (he refers to Sh'mot as Sefer haG'ulah - see his introduction to Sefer Sh'mot). Therefore, the story needs to "pick up" from the onset of the exile, in order to allow the Sefer to be thematically whole. The reason that only a few names are mentioned in Sh'mot is that this is a thumbnail sketch and reminder of what we already know from B'resheet - sort of a "previously in our story" introduction to the next episode.

There may be something else implied by this brief recounting which will also help us figure out why Mosheh was the ideal leader to reverse the fortunes of the house of Ya'akov - but, first, a much larger question:

WHY DIPLOMACY?

The goal of Mosheh's mission seems to be to lead B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt and to bring them to Sinai to worship God (see 3:12) - and then to the Land (3:8). Why must this job be done with diplomacy - and with the protracted and painful negotiations with Pharaoh which take a long time (according to the Midrash - one year) and take a terrible toll in human suffering? Why couldn't the omnipotent God just take the B'nei Yisra'el out of Egypt in one fell swoop? Surely our imaginations can easily conjure up a picture of swift and immediate redemption and exodus - but that wasn't God's plan. Why did God elect to employ a diplomat and to command him to negotiate with Pharaoh?

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE EXODUS

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the exodus was not merely to liberate this nation of slaves - or even to resettle them in their ancestral Land - it was to bring them to Sinai:

...and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain. (3:12)

The clear expectation is that the people will be willing to follow Mosheh out of Egypt, into the desert - and worship God at that place. (There is a further expectation - that they will be willing to follow him into the Land - see the Ramban on this verse.)

For this to happen, the B'nei Yisra'el will have to be fully aware of two realities: Who God is - and who they are. They must have full awareness that Hashem, the God of Yisra'el is the only power to whom they owe complete allegiance and that He controls the heavens and earth.

They must also be aware of their glorious past and even more glorious destiny. They are the direct descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov; they are destined to become God's cherished people, His treasure among the nations - and a kingdom of Kohanim (Sh'mot 19:5-6).

We may infer from the verses at the beginning of our Sefer that the B'nei Yisra'el, at this point in time, did not share either of these critical attitudes and beliefs. (This deficiency becomes clear as Mosheh tries to convince the people that they should cooperate - and they want him to leave the situation as is and accept the status quo - see 5:19-21) As a people, they were in no way prepared for this national metamorphosis. Let's examine the beginning of our Sefer to discover the self-image of the B'nei Yisra'el at the time of imminent G'ulah. We will focus on three passages in the first chapter to illustrate the point.

III. "THESE ARE THE NAMES"

These are the names of the B'nei Yisra'el who came to Egypt with Ya'akov, each with his household: Re'uven, Shim'on, Levi, and Yehudah, Yissachar, Z'vulun, and Binyamin, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. (1:1-4)

If we compare this brief list with the (nearly) exhaustive list of the seventy members of Ya'akov's household who descended to Egypt (B'resheet 46:10-27), we note two glaring differences:

(A) The B'resheet list is complete, including grandsons, a granddaughter - and several family events (e.g. the death of Er and Onan, v. 12). The second list, on the other hand, only lists the direct sons of Ya'akov. (see the end of section V for the answer)

(B) This one is a bit more subtle. The order of the list in B'resheet is the children of Leah, the children of Zilpah (Leah's handmaid), the children of Rachel and the children of Bilhah (Rachel's handmaid). In other words, the order is by mothers: The house of Leah and the house of Rachel. This is a reasonable order, given that Leah not only bore the most children but that her children were the oldest. In our verse, a slight change has taken place: The first two verses include the sons of Leah and the one (descending) son of Rachel (Yoseph was already in Egypt). The last verse lists the four sons of the handmaids. What has changed here?

If we look back at B'resheet 37:2 (see my shiur on Parashat Mikketz), we see that the children of the handmaids were set apart from the rest of the sons. As we explained, this was because there was a clear-cut class distinction within the family - sons of the wives (Rachel and Leah) occupying a favored status as opposed to the sons of the handmaids. In times of trouble (the famine), this distinction was erased (indicated by the order of the listing in B'resheet) but, now that the family was firmly settled into life in Egypt, those old differences resurfaced. Setting the tone for our story, we are presented with families which do not see themselves as equal and are not united.

IV. "VAYISH'R'TZU"

Then Yoseph died, and all his brothers, and that whole generation. But the B'nei Yisra'el *paru* (were fruitful) *vayish'r'tzu* (???); *vayirbu* (they multiplied) and *vaya'atz'mu bim'od m'od* (grew exceedingly strong), so that the land was filled with them. (1:6-7)

Rashi, commenting on the many verbs used to describe the amazing growth of the B'nei Yisra'el (which explains how we get from 70 people to a nation of several million at the time of the exodus), quotes the Midrash that the women would have sextuplets (playing on the six words used here).

S'forno has a different explanation. *Paru* (were fruitful) indicates having children, *vayirbu* (mutiliplied) indicates having many children and *vaya'atz'mu* indicates demographic and physical strength - all positive terms. *Vayishr'tzu*, however, is a pejorative term. A *sheretz* is a rodent, commonly used as the archetype of impurity (e.g. *tovel v'sheretz b'yado* - see BT Ta'anit 16a, MT Teshuvah 2:3). S'forno explains that the whole generation which died (v. 6) refers to the entire group of 70 who had come from the Land. Once that link was broken, the people "turned to the ways of rodents, running (there is a Hebrew words play here) to the pit of despair." [emphasis added]

It is unclear whether S'forno means that they engaged in the worst aspects of Egyptian culture or that they lost their sense of dignity and pride - but that becomes clear in his explanation of our third passage.

V. "LET US DEAL WISELY"

Now a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yoseph. He said to his people, "Look, the Israelite people are more numerous and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal wisely with them, or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land." Therefore they set taskmasters over them to oppress them with forced labor. (1:8-11)

The core of Pharaoh's speech here is phrased oddly: "...in the event of war, [they will] join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land."

Why would a conquering nation want to - or even need to - escape? Rashi is bothered by this and explains that Pharaoh's intent was that the B'nei Yisra'el would throw the Egyptians out - but he didn't want to utter these horrifying words, so he turned them around. Ramban has a different approach; he explains that the concern is that the B'nei Yisra'el will "fleece the land" with the other enemies and will take the booty with them when they leave.

S'forno has a different approach to the verse. He reads the phrase: "...or they will increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies and fight against us..." as a parenthetic thought. In other words, Pharaoh's statement to the people was Let us deal wisely and get them out of the land - and his motivation for this was the concern of a fifth column in his land.

To that end, the Egyptians appointed taskmasters over the B'nei Yisra'el in order to afflict them - figuring that that would inspire them to leave. After all, what reason did they have to stay? Their ancestral and promised land was fertile again (the famine was long since over) and it was now clear that they were unwanted in Egypt. How surprised Pharaoh and the Egyptians were when the B'nei Yisra'el acquiesced to the human tax and complied with the orders to build cities for Pharaoh!

Once the Egyptians saw that these descendants of political and spiritual giants, (and of their former viceroy), were willing to accept this humiliating work - everything spiraled down. (The astounding parallel to the horrific tragedy of our century are too obvious to mention...) They were made slaves (again, no word of protest, rebellion or flight from the B'nei Yisra'el) and finally were the objects of limited genocide! The only protest we hear is from the midwives (who were possibly Egyptian women - [Avrabanel - after all, why would Pharaoh entrust this heinous mission to Jewish women?] In addition, their reference to the Hebrew women [v. 19 - *Ivriot*] seems to be exclusive). As S'forno explains, the B'nei Yisra'el had totally lost their sense of self-worth, dignity and mission - and were already enslaved to the ideals of the Egyptian culture and polis. They were more concerned with successfully remaining in Egypt and gaining the approval of their Egyptian king than with maintaining their own heritage and legacy.

S'forno also uses this approach to explain the beginning verses: "And these are the names..." that only these names (the sons of Ya'akov) were worthy of mention - but the other members of the family (including grandchildren) weren't worthy, as their righteousness was not of the same caliber as their parents. (This explains the first question in section III above).

VI. "Hashem IS JUST AND I AM WICKED"

We can summarize the "failings" of the B'nei Yisra'el as three:

A lack of dignity

A self-induced subjugation to Pharaoh and Egyptian culture

Continued tribalism

The B'nei Yisra'el were captive to the influence of Pharaoh and his court. In order to move the people into an awareness of their own mission and pride - and of the ultimate power of their God - they had to hear the Egyptians declare the power and justice of God and admit to their (Egypt's) own failings. This is the constant theme of the diplomatic interaction between Mosheh and Pharaoh - and B'nei Yisra'el will not be ready to leave (and move on to Sinai and the Land) until their biggest cultural icon (Pharaoh) comes to them in the middle of the night and begs them to leave, accepting the justice of their God and His decree.

In order to enable this, the diplomat would have to be someone who had a sense of dignity, was comfortable within the court of Pharaoh - and who understood the essential unity of the nation. [emphasis added]

VII. ENTER MOSHEH

Adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh, Mosheh was familiar with court protocol and etiquette. He had a sense of dignity, since he was not subject to the decrees of slavery - nor was he culturally enslaved to the Pharaoh - which is often the blessing of those who are inside. (Think about how many people are star-struck and successfully encouraged to buy products endorsed by the glitterati - but those who work behind the scenes of the corridors of power and influence are not nearly as awed by the stars).

As an outsider, he also understood the basic unity of the B'nei Yisra'el. Note how the Torah describes his interest in seeing the plight of the people: "Mosheh grew and went out among his brothers..." (2:11);

For Mosheh, it wasn't a case of seeing how the Levites or Danites were faring - all of them were (equally) his brothers. (This is easy to understand, when we compare the way members of a large Jewish community identify themselves as opposed to those in a small rural area. Those of us who have the luxury of living in a densely populated community identify ourselves - and claim allegiance - with a particular stream of thought, synagogue or school. Jews living in remote areas, on the other hand, first and foremost see themselves as Jews and point to their "fellows" in the city - they understand the essential unity of our people which often eludes the city folk.)

Mosheh was the perfect candidate who could unify the people, represent them with dignity in the court and battle Pharaoh on his own turf until the king of Egypt would declare:

"Hashem is just and I am my people are wicked" (9:27).

There is one other piece of information which we are given in the opening chapters which clarifies the special place of Mosheh at this juncture of our history.

VIII. THE UNDERCURRENT OF B'RESHEET: FRACTURED BROTHERHOOD

Throughout Sefer B'resheet, we find a common story line regarding family relationships. The younger brother is favored over the older brother - and neither brother is comfortable with that outcome.

We first meet Kayyin and Hevel (Chapter 4), where the reaction (fratricide) is the most extreme. God favors Hevel's offering - and Kayyin kills him in response.

Next, we meet Yishma'el and Yitzchak (Chapter 21). Although Yishma'el doesn't attack Yitzchak, we never find a rapprochement between the two. The only time they meet again is at their father's burial.

We then meet Esav and Ya'akov (Chapters 25-35). Even though Esav threatens to kill Ya'akov (which fits with Esav's impetuous nature), they are eventually reconciled - after which they go their separate ways.

Next come Yoseph and his brothers (Chapters 37-50) - surely the most developed and complex fraternal relationship(s) in B'resheet. In this case, the brothers are eventually reconciled and stay together.

Fittingly, Sefer B'resheet ends with another younger-older scene, depicting the favoring of Ephraim over M'nasheh (Chapter 48). We are given no information about either one's reaction to grandfather's blessing - and it seems that things are improving in this vein as time goes on.

IX. MOSHEH, AHARON AND MIRIAM - WORKING TOGETHER

Now, at the beginning of Sh'mot, we are introduced to Mosheh. He is clearly favored by his parents, as he is described as "good" at his birth, they make every effort to shield him and then, relying on some form of divine intervention, send him down the Nile. His older brother and sister have every reason to be jealous (following the B'resheet model - and the present state of the inter-tribal relations) - yet his sister (who is mentioned but not even named in the second chapter) looks after him and ensures his safety and continued relationship with family. When Mosheh is finally sent by God to Pharaoh, he refuses unless his older brother is included in the mission. God tells him that Aharon will rejoice upon seeing him (4:14) - and, as the commentators explain, he would rejoice over Mosheh's selection as God's messenger and not harbor any jealousy.

For his part, Mosheh includes both of his older siblings in the exodus and leadership of the people. Aharon is one of his right-hand men (Sh'mot 24:14) and Miriam leads the women (15:20).

Mosheh, Aharon and Miriam have finally corrected the tragic and destructive history of sibling rivalry - which is what got us to Egypt in the first place (Yoseph being sold by his brothers).

This only serves to underscore the enormity of the tragedy when Mosheh's leadership begins to unravel (see Bamidbar 12). It only happens when Aharon and Miriam speak ill of Mosheh, exhibiting jealousy over his unique relationship with God. Even the family which led us from slavery to freedom and to an appreciation of our own great mission couldn't fully escape the legacy of B'resheet.

OHRNET

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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Birth of a Nation

"And there he became a nation." (Devarim 26:5)

I have a friend who became religiously observant in New York City. He had been attending a synagogue on a fairly regular basis. One day he was leaving the shul after the morning service. He was returning the paper *yarmulke* to its place at the shul's entrance when he decided he wanted to "wear" his new-found religiosity more openly.

Leaving the shul, he turned, not toward his apartment but in the other direction. Within a few minutes he found himself at the door of a Jewish bookstore. At the end of the counter there was a carousel that carried the entire gamut of Orthodox Jewish headgear. Approaching the carousel, he began to turn it slowly.

He was amazed at the range of choices. There were white *kipot* and green *kipot*, black *kipot*, knitted *kipot*, leather *kipot*, velvet *kipot*, cloth *kipot* and *kipot* that looked like they had come off the head of an Afghan herdsman.

"Which one am I going to chose?" he thought to himself.

Without thinking too much about it, he picked a large black velvet *kipah* and plonked it on the top of his head. Making his way to the cashier, he paid for his new *yarmulke*, and walked outside, and stopped in his tracks.

Everything had changed.

He had changed. The world had changed.

He thought to himself, "I have become an ambassador. I have become an ambassador for the Jewish People. Everything I do now will be judged through the lens of my Jewishness. If I push in line, people won't say, 'Who is this guy pushing in line?' They will say, 'Who is this Jew pushing in line?' And if I give up my seat to an elderly person on the subway, I will have sanctified the Name of Heaven."

Little do we realize that the good name of the Jewish People, and, in a sense, along with them, the G-d of the Jewish People rests on small pieces of cloth that are perched precariously upon our heads.

This week's Torah portion marks the beginning of the birth of a nation.

"And there he became a nation."

The Haggadah of Passover quotes this verse and explains that the Jewish People were "outstanding" there in Egypt. They did not change their manner of dress, their names or their language. They were a very visible and very distinct minority.

As we were born, so we continue.

Every interaction a "uniformed" Jew has with the world-at-large has the potential to sanctify the Name

of Heaven. And it can be done in the smallest of ways.

I have seen this same friend go up to garbage collectors (even if he does not live in the area) and say "Thank you!"

The other day he was in an art shop. He was looking for a very, very, fine paintbrush. He found four no. 0000s. To save himself another trip to the art store, he took all of them. In line to pay, he noticed the cashier looking at him with an expression of mild distaste.

Handing the brushes to her, he remarked, "I took the last of these brushes. You may want to reorder them so you will have them in stock when the next person comes along."

The assistant looked up at him for a second, and smiled.

We are all ambassadors in the birth of our nation.

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shemot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males.

Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid.

Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tzipporah, whose father Yitro approves of their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mount Sinai), Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, the Land promised to their ancestors.

Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker, G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt"?
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) nogsim b) shotrim?
20. How were the shotrim rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

Answers

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - Lashon hara (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah.
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (pakod pakadeti)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a kohen.
15. 4:20 It was used by Avraham for akeidat Yitzchak and will be used in the future by Mashiach.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Moses' Many Names

An obscure passage in the Book of Chronicles discusses Caleb's children sired through his "Jewish" wife. She was said to have given birth to Yered, the father of Gedor; Chever, the father of Socho; and Yekutiel, the father of Zanoach (I Chron. 4:18, according to Radak). However, rabbinic tradition tells us that the entire Book of Chronicles is meant as fodder for exegesis and should not be read literally (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3). In that spirit, the Midrash interprets all of the names listed above as references to none other than Moses (*Moshe*). This assertion is bolstered by the appearance of Pharaoh's daughter Bithiah at the end of the passage in question.

Drawing from the above verse in Chronicles, the Midrash asserts that Moses had six names:

1. *Yered* refers to Moses for one of three reasons: According to the first two explanations, this name is derived from the Hebrew verb *la'redet* ("to descend") and either refers to Moses bringing down the Torah from the Heavens above, or to his bringing G-d's Holy Presence down to Earth. The third explanation connects *Yered* to the Hebrew verb *l'rdot* ("to lord over"), and refers to Moses' role as the king/leader of the Jewish people (see *Zevachim* 102a). The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) adds that Moses was called *Yered* because the manna "descended" from the heavens in his times (and, actually, in his merit, according to *Taanit* 9a).
2. "Father of *Gedor*," or *Avigdor*, is related to the Hebrew word *geder* ("fence," "boundary") and refers to the fact that although the Jewish People merited many fence-makers — that is, important Sages who "built a fence around the Torah" (*Avot* 1:1) to distance people from sin — Moses was the "father" of all such leaders. The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) clarifies that Moses rectified the Jews' breaches by establishing the "boundaries" of law.
3. *Chever* refers to Moses in one of two ways: First, the Midrash links this word to the Hebrew word *chibbur* ("connection," "bond"), explaining that Moses served as the impetus for connecting the Jewish People to G-d. The Vilna Gaon (to I Chron. 4:18) explains that Moses did this by presiding over putting up the Mishkan. Second, the Midrash links the name Chever to the Hebrew root AYIN-BET-REISH (presumably, by way of the interchangeability of CHET and AYIN), which means "to pass." The Midrash cryptically says that this refers to Moses causing punishments and retribution to be "passed over," which I think refers to his pleading with G-d to not punish the Jews for the Golden Calf.
4. "Father of *Socho*," or *Avi-Socho*, is understood by the Midrash as related to the Hebrew word *sochech* ("gazer," "seer"), which is a codeword for prophecy. The Midrash thus explains that Moses is called Avi-Socho because he was the "father of prophets" in the sense that he reached a level of prophecy unparalleled by all his future successors. The Talmud (*Megillah* 13a) adds that Moses was like a *succah* ("protective hut") for the Jewish People, because his merits were so plentiful (see *Targum Rav Yosef* to I Chron. 4:18). The Vilna Gaon (to I Chron. 4:18) clarifies that this refers to Moses protecting the Jewish

People from punishment after they complained at Taveira (see Num. 11:2).

5. *Yekutiel* is expounded by the Midrash as though it were derived from the Hebrew word *mikaveh/tikvah* ("waiting," "hoping"), in reference to Moses' role in establishing G-d's place as the Great Hope of the Jewish People. The Vilna Gaon (to I Chron. 4:18) explains that Moses achieved this by serving as the reason for the manna to fall every morning, thereby giving the Jews a reason to look forward to G-d's bounty daily.
6. "Father of Zanoach," or *Avi-Zanoach*, is seen by the Midrash as related to the Hebrew root ZAYIN-NUN-CHET, which means "to forsake/reject/leave." In this sense, Moses was the father of "the rejecters," because under his leadership the Jewish People "rejected" idol worship. The Vilna Gaon (to I Chron. 4:18) asserts that this refers to Moses helping the Jews achieve Divine atonement after the sin of the Ten Spies.

After explaining these six names, the Midrash lists another four names that were given to Moses based on other sources:

1. *Toviah* (Tobias) — because when Moses was born, the Bible says (Ex. 2:1): "And she (Moses' mother) saw him, that he was 'good' (*tov*)." Nowadays, most people pronounce this name as Tuviah even though in the Bible it is vowelized as Toviah. Dr. Alexander Beider notes in his *Dictionary of Ashkenazi Given Names* that scholars do not know what caused the vowel shift in this name. The name Toviah appears several other times in the Bible, seemingly in reference to other people, including the father of a family that returned to the Holy Land with Zerubabel (Ezra 2:60, Neh. 7:62), a *kohen* in the early Second Temple period (Zech. 6:10, 6:14), and an Ammonite slave who tried to thwart Nehemiah's efforts in rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 2:10–19, 3:35, 4:1, 6–7, 13:4-7).
2. *Shemaiah* (see I Chron. 24:6) — because G-d "heard" (*shema*) Moses' prayers. This name is understood as a reference to Moses because the person in Chronicles who bears this name was said to have played a role in establishing the 24 Kohanic Shifts, which is an institute that dates back to Moses. This name also appears several other times in the Bible in reference to other people: a legitimate prophet in the time of Jeroboam (II Kings 12:22, II Chron. 12:5-15), a false prophet in the time of Jeremiah (Jer. 29:31-32), and various other Levites and Israelites.
3. *Ben Netanel* (see I Chron. 24:6) — because Moses "gave" (*natan*) over the Torah from G-d to the Jewish People.
4. *Levi* (see I Chron. 24:6) — because Moses was a grandson of Levi.

Based on these additional names, the Midrash asserts that, all in all, Moses had ten names. The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3 and *Shemot Rabbah* 1:26) concludes that of all the various names that Moses had, the Torah chose to refer to him as *Moshe*, the name which was given to him by Bithiah, as reward for the kindness that she bestowed upon him by adopting him and raising him. And even G-d called him Moshe and not any of his other names.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (1902-1979) explains that each of Moses' ten names reflects a different facet of his personality and teaches us something different about his greatness. The name *Moshe*, in particular, teaches us that from a young age Moses was instilled with the concept of giving up one's life to do kindness to others, just as his foster-mother Bithiah had risked her life by taking in a Jewish child simply in order to help the baby survive. We see this aspect of Moses' personality when he later defended the Jewish People following the sin of the Golden Calf and even requested to be "erased from Your book" (Ex. 32:32) in pursuit of saving the Jews from punishment.

Either way, the Midrash's conclusion implies that only the name *Moshe* was given to him by Bithiah, while Moses' other names were given to him by

others. Indeed, the apocryphal Midrashic work *Divrei HaYamim Shel Moshe* (see Rabbi J. D. Eisenstein's *Otzar Midrashim*, page 358) explains that Moses received each of his names from a different person: Bithiah called him *Moshe*, Amram (Moses' father) called him *Chever* (because for Moses' sake he reunited/reconnected with his previously-divorced wife to sire this son), Yocheved (Moses' mother) called him *Yekutiel*, Miriam (Moses' sister) called him *Yered* (because she "went down" to the river to see his fate), Aaron (Moses' brother) called him *Avi-Zanoach* (because his father had initially "forsaken" his mother by divorcing her), Kohath (Moses' grandfather) called him *Avi-Gedor* (because through Moses' birth the decree to throw all Jewish boys into the river was repealed), Moses' wet-nurse called him Socho (*Zayit Raanan* notes that even though Moses' mother nursed him, she apparently hired a wet-nurse as well), and the Jewish people called him *Shemaiah ben Netanel*, and this tradition is also cited by *Sefer HaYashar* and *Yalkut Shimoni* to Exodus 166. However, see Ibn Ezra (to Ex. 2:22, 4:20) who dismisses *Divrei HaYamim Shel Moshe* from being a reliable source because it does not come from the prophets or Chazal.

The Talmud (*Bava Batra* 15a) claims that Heiman (found in Psalms) is also another name for Moses. That name literally means the "trustworthy one." The Talmudic identification of Heiman with Moses might be the basis for the Zoharic appellation *Raya Mehemna* ("the trustworthy shepherd") that is also applied to Moses.

Rabbi Gedaliah Ibn Yachya (1515-1587), in his work *Shalsheles HaKabbalah*, cites a tradition that claims that Moses' original name was Tamar/Tamur, which means "raising" (as in "raising" an adopted child) in Egypt. To the best of my knowledge, this name is not mentioned in any other source.

Interestingly, the poem *Yetziv Pitgam* (customarily read on the Second Day of Shavuot) refers to somebody named "the humble man Yehonatan." Rabbi Moshe Teitelbaum (1759-1841) claims that Yehonatan is actually one of Moses' ten names, but his grandson-in-law Rabbi Chanoch Henoch Teitelbaum (Mayer) of Sassov (1884-1942) points out that there is no rabbinic source that claims Yehonatan as one of Moses' names.

I would note, however, that the name Yehonatan is essentially the same as the name *Netanel*, as both names are comprised of a cognate of *natan* ("give"), plus a theophoric element that refers to G-d. In *Yehonatan*, that theophoric reference is the prefix *yeho-* which represents the first three letters of the Tetragrammaton, while in the case of *Netanel* the theophoric element is the suffix *-el*, which also refers to G-d. What's fascinating is that the Bible (Judges 18:30) relates that the priest at Micah's idol was named Yehonatan, son of Gershon, son of Menashe, with the letter NUN in the name Menashe superscripted as though it were not part of the actual text. Based on this, the Rabbis (see *Bava Batra* 109b-110a) explain that the idolatrous priest Yehonatan was none other than a grandson of Moses (because *Menashe* sans the NUN spells out *Moshe*, and Moses had a son named Gershon). So even if Yehonatan is not explicitly mentioned as an alternate name for Moses, it is certainly the name of one of his grandsons who may have been named after his illustrious grandfather.

For more discussion of whether the name Moses is a Hebrew translation of the Egyptian names Monius or Mosh, see "Appendix B: Egyptian Names in the Bible" in my book *Lashon HaKodesh: History, Holiness, & Hebrew* (Mosaica Press).

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

THE BLESSINGS OF THE SHEMA (PART 13)

"The most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched
– they must be felt with the heart."
(Helen Keller)

The third blessing continues: "True, You are the First and You are the Last, and other than You we have no king, redeemer or savior. You redeemed us from Egypt, our G-d, and from the house of slavery You liberated us."

The final section of our blessing switches its focus from affirming everything that we declared in the Shema to the redemption from Egypt, which is a Torah obligation to remember each day. The word "true" is repeated several times in the blessing to emphasize the centrality of the Exodus.

By declaring that G-d is "the First" and "the Last" we are also affirming that G-d is also everything else in between. There is no moment when G-d is not present and watching over us, ensuring that we as the Jewish nation will endure forever. There have been many dark and tragic periods in Jewish history when G-d's presence seemed to have been absent. But this mistaken perception could not be further from the truth. It is *not* the reality and *not* the truth. Rather, our ability to recognize His overt presence is missing. Even at the bleakest times, when it appears to us that G-d has abandoned us to our enemies and we will be enslaved in perpetuity, it is not true. G-d is our Redeemer and our Savior. And He always will be.

Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik (1853-1918) was a famed Rabbi of Brisk in Belarus and one of the greatest scholars of his generation, renowned for his exacting and rigorous approach to understanding and elucidating the Torah. He explains that there are two dimensions to slavery. The first one is that a slave is the property of his master. Even when he is not physically involved in working, he still belongs to his master who can do with him as he wishes. The second dimension to slavery is that the slave sees no fruit from his labors despite the fact that he is put to work. Everything he produces is owned by his master. This reality is the cause of enormous mental anguish. Accordingly, the phrase, "You redeemed us from Egypt, our G-d, and from the house of slavery You liberated us" is referring to these two different dimensions of slavery. "You redeemed us" refers to the physical slavery that ended and that we no longer have to be involved in backbreaking toil that produces nothing for us. On the other hand, the "liberation" refers to our being freed from the physical subjugation of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Maharal points out that often when a person has been enslaved for a very long time, they remain in a mental state of servitude long after they have been physically released from bondage. After 210 years of enslavement, G-d needed to remove the mental chains of slavery that generations of Jews had lived under, just as He needed to physically remove us from Egypt.

When describing to Moshe Rabbeinu how He was going to free His chosen nation from slavery, G-d says (*Shemot* 6:7), "I shall take you to Me for a people, and I shall be a G-d to you, and you shall know that I am your G-d, Who takes you out from

under the burdens of Egypt." The first Rebbe from Gur, Rabbi Yitzchak Meir Alter, points out that the word for "burden" in Hebrew is closely related to the word for "tolerance." He explains that the root of the problem in Egypt was that the Jewish People had become so accustomed to slavery that they became tolerant of their enslaved state to the point that they no longer had any expectations of being liberated.

To live an existence that offers no hope for the future is possibly the most dismal reality of all. Even under the most appalling circumstances, a Jew must never abandon the anticipation that "G-d's salvation can come at the blink of an eye" (*Midrash Lekach Tov* for Esther 4:17). Rabbi Yisrael Spira (1889-1989) was the saintly and revered Rebbe of Bluzhov, a great-grandson of the Bnei Yissachar and a Holocaust survivor who spent the war years in the Janowska and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps. He would try to give emotional and spiritual support to his fellow inmates. He would tell them that the Hebrew word for slave is "*avadim*," which is spelled '*ayin*' '*bet*' '*dalet*' '*yud*' '*mem*.' These letters form the acronym for the Hebrew phrase, "*David Ben Yishai Avdecha Meshicha* — Your slave David the son of Yishai is the chosen one (the Messiah)." Then he would tell them that even in their present impoverished spiritual state and subhuman physical conditions — even while deeply-mired in their reality of being "*avadim*" — we find allusions to the eventual freedom we await with the coming of the Messiah. G-d is together with us wherever we find ourselves.

The Rabbis offer an additional explanation as to why our blessing uses both the word redeemer and the word savior. The Hebrew words for redeemer and savior are "*goel*" and "*moshiah*." According to the Rabbis, the difference between the two is quite significant. "*Goel*" means a redemption that is all-embracing, an absolute salvation, whereas "*moshiah*" is only a partial deliverance from the danger. Regardless of whether we are being redeemed entirely or only partially, the Source is the always the same.

To be continued...

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Megillah 2-8

The Megillah and Talmud Torah

"The Yeshiva of Rebbe (Rabbi Yehuda HaNassi) would interrupt ("mevatlin," which literally means nullify) their Torah study in order to come to read the Megillah of Esther on Purim."

Our *sugya* explains the textual basis for their course of action (Esther 9:28). However, the commantaries seem puzzled by the words "*mevatlin Talmud Torah.*" Although the yeshiva students *paused* their own normal Torah study to read the Megillah, as per the mitzvah, their reading the Megillah was *also* a manner of Torah study and not a "nullification of Torah study"! After all, the Megillah of Esther is one of the twenty-four books of the Tanach! (*Rashash and many others*)

Numerous fascinating answers are offered by the commentaries and here is a brief presentation of a few approaches. The *gemara* in Mesechet Megillah 18a references some enigmatic words that appear in the Megillah. The identity of the "*achashtranim bnei haramachim*" (Esther 8:10) is vague, although from the context it is clear that it refers to couriers. Our Sages admit that we read about these *achashtranim* without a full grasp of their identity. However, we nevertheless fulfill the mitzvah of reading of the Megillah without complete understanding the exact translation of the text. But despite fulfilling the mitzvah of reading the Megillah, it can be said that there is an aspect of *bitul Torah* when reading these words — a failure to fulfill the mitzvah to learn Torah while reading those words — due to a lack of reading comprehension. (*Magen Avraham, Maharil Diskin and others offer a glimpse into further understanding the need to understand words of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah in order to fulfill the mitzvah of Talmud Torah*)

Some suggest that the *bitul Torah* of hearing the Megillah is not related to the actual reading or hearing the Megillah being read. Rather, it refers to the time and effort required for the students to go out from the yeshiva to join with the rest of the people of the community, presumably in the central *shul* of their locale. This answer is alluded to in the words of the *gemara*, which says that the yeshiva students interrupted their Torah study "to *come* to read the Megillah." They did not read the Megillah as individuals or even as a separate yeshiva. Rather, they interrupted their studies in order to publicize the miracle of Purim together with all of the people in their community. Fulfilling the mitzvah in this way is preferable since "in the multitude of the people, the King is glorified." (Mishlei 14:28) Although travel from their yeshiva to the preferred destination where the Megillah would be read resulted in diminished time and ability for Torah study, it was the correct way to fulfill the mitzvah of reading the Megillah. In this manner they would express the greatness of Hashem and their gratitude for the miracle of Purim in the best possible way. (*Aruch Hashulchan Orach Chaim 687:8)*

A third approach is that the concern for *bitul Torah* was not with regards to the amount or *quantity* of their Torah study but rather concerned the *quality* of their Torah study. Torah is the Divine wisdom that Hashem chose to share with us, to teach us how to follow His ways and grow as close to our Creator as possible. To do this, Hashem's will is that we should study the moral teachings of the Torah to the maximum, each person according to his own personal ability. We are taught, for example, that one who is capable of *mishna* study should not confine his Torah study to the Tanach. And this is true for all of the various ways, levels and areas of Torah study: each person is instructed to pursue the study of the Torah in the most elevated and lofty way possible for him as an individual. A person who is capable of

delving into the depths of the "Sea of the Talmud" should emphasize *gemara* study more than the study of *mishna* and Tanach. Many or most of the students of the Rebbe's yeshiva were pursuing relatively advanced levels of the Torah's Oral Law, as is the case with the typical yeshiva in our own day. For them — and for many other Torah students like them — it would be considered to be *bitul Torah* to diminish the quality of their Torah study. Regarding the mitzvah of Talmud Torah it would not be appropriate to halt the yeshiva's *gemara shiur* and their individual efforts to pursue the depths of *Shas* in order to fulfill the mitzvah of reading the Megillah of Esther on the night and day of Purim. But halt their own study they must — in order to read the Megillah and fulfill this special mitzvah instituted by *Chazal*.

- *Megillah 3a*

PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

THE SONG OF THE DAY

The day says: "Day by day expresses speech and night by night relates comprehension." (Tehillim 19:3)

In the earth's daylight hours, Hashem's creations and doings are visible to us and we constantly bless Him, each day anew. Nights serve to separate the days and give recesses for contemplation and absorption, important because an unending day would result in mental overload. Moreover, if not for the nights, the days would go unappreciated.

The Kabbalists teach that the world is created anew each day. Similarly, the soul is divided into sparks, and each day a different spark shines forth. It is for this reason that many mitzvahs apply on a daily basis. The Kabbalists further teach that each day is unique, and each prayer serves its own purpose in history. Hence, days are not repetitive, but cumulative. Day by day, our experiences and comprehension of Hashem increase, and so does our praise.

- Sources: *Tehillim* (68:2); *Pri Eitz Chaim* (*Tefillah* 7); *Machsof HaLavan* (*Kedoshim*); *Sefas Emes* (to *Tehillim* 19:3); *Ohr HaChaim* (*Ber.* 47:29)

**In loving memory of Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershman

Foreign but Equal

The first few verses of our Torah portion describe the descent of the Jews into Egyptian slavery and torture. The three distinct phases are apparent in the prophecy to Avraham: "*Your offspring will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs, and they (i.e. the natives) will enslave them and oppress them." (Ber. 15:13)*

First, the Jews were subjected to a labor tax. As aliens of foreign origin they were made to pay a high price for the very air they breathed. But when these and similar burdensome laws directed at the foreigners did not achieve their objective, the Jews were declared to be slaves. Stripped of their rights, the entire Egyptian populace had authority over them. This soon morphed into an embittered torture in which they endured daily wanton abuse intended to crush their spirit. Thus, all three phases — *foreigners, enslavement,* and *oppression* — which were foretold to Avraham, were realized.

The beginning, the root, of the unspeakable abuse was *gerut* — treating a foreigner, a stranger, as if he has no rights. This mistreatment is emblazed in our national memory and finds unusual emphasis in the Torah's laws. No less than twenty-four times, whenever the Torah establishes rights concerning persons and things, the stranger is placed under the special protection of the law. We are cautioned multiple times to treat the stranger and the convert with very great respect and, in so doing, to remember our experience as foreigners in Egypt. (*Vayikra 19:34; Shemot 22:20)*

The degree of justice in a country, writes Rav Hirsch, is measured not by the rights accorded to the native-born, the rich, and the well-connected, but by the justice meted out to the unprotected stranger. A basic characteristic of Jewish Law is that the homeland does not grant human rights, but, rather, human rights grant the homeland. There is no distinction between citizen's rights and human rights. Rather, anyone who has accepted upon himself the moral laws of humanity — the seven Noahide laws — could claim the right to live in the Land of Israel.

When setting forth this principle, the Torah reminds us: *Recall that you were once foreigners in Egypt*. We are to recall how that first injustice — disparate treatment of foreigners — quickly burgeoned into full blown slavery and cruel affliction, and to guard ourselves and our society against such dangerous missteps.

In Rav Hirsch's view, this principle of the equal treatment of foreigners extended even to situations in which the foreigners were less than exemplary citizens. In the wake of the pogroms in Russia, hundreds of Polish and Russian refugees arrived in Frankfurt, some of whom became involved in questionable activities. The Kehilla board wanted to have them expelled from the city for fear that they would arouse antagonism against the Jewish community as a whole. Rav Hirsch would not hear of it. "First throw the wealthy criminals out of the city. Only afterwards can you do the same to the poor ones."

- *Sources: Commentary, Shemot 1:14*