

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 more than 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 archives.

Hersh ben Perel Chana, cousin of very close friends of ours, has been confirmed as one of approximately 240 initial hostages to Hamas in Gaza. The Wall St. Journal featured Hersh and his family in a front page article on October 16. Chabad, OU, and many synagogues recommend psalms (Tehillim) to recite daily for the safety of our people. May our people in Israel wipe out the evil of Hamas, protect us from violence by anti-Semites around the world, and restore peace for our people quickly and successfully – with the help of Hashem.

Sefer Shemot explores how one family, Yaakov's direct descendants, over generations becomes a nation, B'Nai Yisrael. In parshat Shemot, the Egyptians quickly forget their debt to Yosef and view the next generations of Jews as rodents or cockroaches, swarming vermin not worthy of considering to be humans. When the Torah discusses the generation following Yosef, it does not even mention any of them by name. Under Paro's leadership, the Egyptians quickly enslave these people whom they consider racially inferior and force them into harsh work. As much as the Egyptians afflict the people, Yaakov's descendants increase rapidly in population – so much so that the land becomes filled with the Jews (chapter 1).

Seeking to control the population, lest B'Nai Yisrael become numerous and powerful enough to take over Egypt, Paro tells the midwives to drown every Jewish baby boy in the Nile. The midwives do not cooperate – they tell Paro that the Jews are like animals and give birth before the midwives can arrive to assist at the deliveries. Paro responds by ordering all the Egyptians to kill any Jewish boys that they find.

A couple from Levi have a baby boy. The mother keeps the child for three months and then places him in a teva (ark, the same word as for Noah's ark) and hides the teva among the reeds at the bank of the river. The baby's older sister waits and watches. Paro's daughter comes to bathe, sees the teva, hears the baby crying, and takes the basket. The baby's sister approaches and asks Batya (Paro's daughter) if she wants her to find a wet nurse.

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l, notes how strange this story is. Miriam approaches Batya without being called and addresses her without prelude, without acknowledging her royal position, and speaks to her as an equal. Rabbi Sacks observes that both Batya and Miriam know that the child is Jewish and that Miriam is the child's sister. There is no person less likely to save a baby Jewish boy from death than Paro's daughter. Moreover, when Batya raises the boy in the palace, she ensures that he knows his origin, that he is Jewish despite living in Paro's palace, an adopted grandchild of the most anti-Semitic ruler in the world.

Batya names the baby boy “Moshe,” which is Egyptian for “child.” Rabbi Sacks notes that every other significant person in the Torah receives his or her name from parents or from God – yet no one ever changes Moshe’s name. For an Egyptian to give a Jewish child a name is unusual, and for that name to remain for his life is even more unusual.

When the child grows up and goes out from the palace, he observes an Egyptian man beating a Jewish slave. Paro’s adopted grandson views the Jewish slave as his brother and considers the Egyptian man as an enemy. How does a man raised in Paro’s anti-Semitic palace from a young age learn empathy and learn to identify with a Jewish slave rather than an Egyptian? Rabbi Sacks observes what most Jewish commentators believe. Batya, Paro’s daughter, must be raising the child to be empathetic (as she is) and to identify with the Jewish slaves rather than with the Egyptian task masters.

Rabbi David Fohrman’s view is consistent with that of Rabbi Sacks. He observes that Miriam stays to watch what happens to her baby brother. She does not know what will happen, but she has pure faith that Hashem will find a way to save her brother. Even when the worst possible person comes and discovers the teva – Paro’s daughter – Miriam still has faith that Hashem will save her brother. This strong faith in a loving God is what Hashem wants to demonstrate to B’Nai Yisrael. God reveals Himself to Moshe as “Eheyeh” – the one who is and always will be with B’Nai Yisrael. When Moshe identifies himself as coming for Eheyeh, B’Nai Yisrael believe him. The basis of their faith is that God has always been with B’Nai Yisrael, is with them now, and always will be with them. The lessons of this faith are what Moshe must teach to B’Nai Yisrael, and the implications of Eheyeh for those who oppress the Jews are what Paro, the Egyptians, and the rest of the world must learn.

After several generations living in Egypt, B’Nai Yisrael view themselves as Egyptian and forget the promise that Hashem will free them from slavery and bring them to the land that He promised to the Avot. Rabbi Label Lam recalls a song he once heard on a trip to Israel, one where the Jews of Germany considered Berlin before the 1930s to be the new Jerusalem and Germany to be the best possible place for Jews to live. This saga is a modern example of how the Jews in Egypt apparently felt before the death of Yosef. More recently, Jews in parts of Europe and North America apparently prefer to live where they are rather than to live in Israel. (Close to 60 percent of Jews live outside Israel.) Recent happenings show that places we had considered safe and desirable for Jews are no longer as safe as we had thought. Anti-Semitic uprisings and attacks in London, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and Toronto demonstrate that these cities are no longer safe for Jews. Similarly, Jewish students are afraid to identify as Jewish at many of what we consider top universities. An important lesson from recent years, and even more so from the past three months, is that we Jews need Israel now perhaps more than ever.

When I was growing up in Los Angeles and during my college years, I never experienced anti-Semitism. My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonrd Cahan, z”l, whose yahrzeit comes up on Rosh Hodesh (next Thursday), who was not many years older than me, experienced anti-Semitism many times, including occassionally in our community. The explosion of anti-Semitism in recent decades would not have surprised him as it has shocked me and many younger Jews. The lessons of Egypt, Germany, and Hamas are warnings for all of us.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah and Alan

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 and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlema for Hersh ben Perel Chana (Hersh Polin, hostage to terrorists in Gaza); Eliezer Tzvi ben Etta (Givati infantry brigade, lead IDF force in Gaza); Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben

Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sarah Feige bat Chaya, Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom

Hannah & Alan

Shemos: In Germany!

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5768

And Yosef died and all his brothers, and all of that generation, and the children of Israel multiplied and swarmed and increased and grew very – very strong and the land became filled with them.
(Shemos 1:6 -7)

This description is not just a slice of ancient history. Rather the Torah is mapping out for us what can easily be titled, “*the anatomy of an exile.*” After Yosef and his brothers and that whole generation, who knew grandfather Yaakov passed away, the next generation began to blunder into the general Egyptian population. They became enamored with Egyptian culture and were at risk of becoming lost for all time.

Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk ztl., the “Ohr Somayach” wrote in his commentary on the 26th chapter of Vayikra about this repeating pattern of Jewish history. As a young Torah scholar, decades before the war he writes the following prescient words. “*Modern man thinks that Berlin is Jerusalem, but a fierce storm of destruction will emanate from Berlin and leave but a scant remnant. The survivors will disburse to other countries and Torah will strike new roots and young scholars will produce undreamed of accomplishments.*” Who could have imagined the hell fury that was lurking in the shadows at that time in Germany when so many felt so comfortable and welcome that the word “Jerusalem” was stricken from the Siddur.

One summer I arrived in Jerusalem with some 50 young American college students, many of whom were stepping foot on the holy land of Israel for the very first time. We gathered together closely in a meeting room on the campus of Ohr Somayach. With some good food in our stomachs a young man with a guitar came to entertain and entertain he did. Chaim Salenger played one song in particular that took me by surprise. I was seduced by the soft strumming of the guitar and his tender sweet voice. He gently he unleashed these powerful words -- these tiny missiles loaded with meaning and tragic irony. Minus the music here are the lyrics of the song entitled, “Germany”:

We are living, in the greatest land
The world has ever known
And my brother,
It appears that we have
Finally found a home
In this country, where a man is sure that
He is truly free
And there's never been a greater land
In all our memory

And we've finally found a home
In Germany.

There's no reason to remain forever
Separate and strange.
We can shed all of our shackles
And embrace the Modern Age
In this country
Where the people are so cultured and refined
And together we can live in perfect harmony
And find
That we'll always have a home
In Germany.

There are those who insist
With their stubborn minds
To hold tightly to the past
And they imagine they're unable
To compromise
All the ties that they hold fast,
To all their silly superstitions
And medieval lies.

How they foolishly believe in what they say
And how they foolishly go facing to
The eastern skies
To Jerusalem,
Where they believe
That they'll return someday.
But no longer
Shall we rely on fantasy or games
No -- no longer
For Berlin is our Jerusalem today
And forever
As we prosper in this land of liberty
And we live and die upon the holy soil of Germany.

We will always have a home
We will always have a home
We will always have a home
in Germany.

<https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5772-shemos/>

Shemot --The Rosh Yeshiva Responds – Woman as a Mohelet

by Rabbi Dov Linzer
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah

“Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me.” (Shemot 4:25)

QUESTION – Alon Shvut, Israel

Rav Linzer, a convert is in need of hatafat dam brit – a pin prick on the corona of the penis which takes the place of circumcision for a male convert who is already circumcised. The only two choices are a non-frum male mohel or a frum female urologist. Which is the better of the two options to perform the hatafah?

ANSWER

Thank you for your question. To give a little background – the Gemara (Avoda Zara 27a) quotes two opinions as to whether a woman can serve as a mohelet. According to one opinion she may do so, because she is considered to be “circumcised,” insofar as she does not have a foreskin. The opposing position argues that she may not do so because she is obligated in the mitzvah of circumcision.

Rambam (Milah 2:1) and Shulkhan Arukh (Yoreh Deah 264:1) rule like the first position, that a woman may serve as a mohel, but Rambam writes that this is only if no man is available, a qualification echoed in Shulkhan Arukh. The preference for a male mohel does not seem to be sourced in the Gemara, and apparently emerges from a sense that this mitzvah is highly “male” in its nature, and hence should be performed by a man, when possible. It is also worth noting that Tosafot (Avoda Zara, 27a, s.v. Isha) is inclined to rule like the opinion that a woman is invalid to serve as a mohel, and Rema notes this position, although he, too, indicates that in the end a woman may serve in this capacity if a man is not available.

As to a Shabbat violator – the argument to invalidate such a person rests on many assumptions. First, that a mumar li’kol ha’Torah, someone who rejects the Torah, is invalid as a mohel. This is how Rema rules, but it goes against the simple sense of the Gemara and Tosafot, as noted by Rabbi Akiva Eiger in his commentary on Shulkhan Arukh. Second, it assumes that a Shabbat violator is to be treated as a mumar li’kol ha’Torah. This may have been true when all Jews were Shabbat observant, but nowadays, it is standard practice to assume that someone who does not keep Shabbat is still very much a part of the Jewish community. Nevertheless, Rav Moshe Feinstein is strict when it comes to having such a person serve as a mohel. In cases when there are no other good options, however, I would definitely permit such a mohel, provided that he is traditionally trained.

So, based on the earlier sources, we should conclude that a woman and a non-Sabbath observant male are equally valid. However, given the way halakha has developed, a frum woman is clearly preferable to a non-frum man, as everyone agrees that a woman is kosher, at least bi’dieved. And of course, we have the example of Tzipporah, Moshe’s wife, who performed a milah on their son, averted tragedy, and helped bring about our redemption from Egypt!

Finally, I should note that the above all assumes that the laws of hatafat dam brit for a conversion follow the same laws as they do for a brit milah. It is possible that the parameters of who would qualify to do the act would be different, however. Since this is not about being obligated in the mitzvah of milah, an argument could be made that a woman should be good li'chatchilah according to all the opinions. Whereas there might be even more reason to invalidate someone who does not keep Shabbat from being part of the conversion process, especially considering the role of acceptance of mitzvot that is central to conversion. This would further argue for preferring the woman to do the hatafah over the man in this case.

* Yeshivat Chovevi Torah, Bronx, New York.

<https://library.yctorah.org/2024/01/ryrshemot/>

Ethical Blindspots

By Rabbi Emile Ackermann *

There is a gap in the biblical narrative between Moshe's birth, his rescue by Pharaoh's daughter and his awakening to the condition of his "brothers"-Echav. Indeed, it is written:

Now at that time Moses, having grown up, went among his brothers and witnessed their sufferings. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers.

If Moshe grew up in the royal palace, as the biblical text implies, how could he recognize his Hebrew brothers?

Moshe's escape is first and foremost an escape from himself: he escapes from his Egyptian condition, he leaves the royal palace to go and see what is happening in the "real" world, far from the privileged space that protected him. And that's when he realizes that those he considered his brothers, the Egyptians, are in fact oppressing another people, the Hebrews! The person who resembled him could not therefore be the Egyptian who was doing the injustice, and so he identified with the figure of otherness represented by the Hebrew who was the victim of Egyptian iniquity. He recognizes his brother as "*the one to whom I am obliged, the one for whom I am responsible*," as Lévinas puts it. He does so at the risk of his own life (Shemot 2:15), because according to Levinas, "*I am responsible for others even if it costs me my life.*" Moshe's first act is to develop an ethical personality that recognizes itself in the Hebrew condition by radically rejecting everything that has made him who he is. The biblical text talks of the advent of the greatest prophet through the break he makes with his environment in the name of the most absolute ethical requirement. This demand is also the source of violence, as he kills an Egyptian who is hitting a Hebrew. It is this ethical demand that marks the beginning of Moshe's epic journey, as he flees to Midyan, meets Yitro and marries his daughter, and receives the divine vision of the burning bush... A journey that begins with violence, first symbolic and then physical.

The murder of the Egyptian is no mere anecdote: it will have a profound impact on Moshe throughout his life.

Midrashic literature helps us to understand the issues surrounding this episode. At the time when his brother Aaron was appointed high priest, an exegesis in Vayikra Rabbah explains that Moshe was not appointed priest because of the homicide he had committed, which would have been incompatible with the priesthood, just as David did not obtain the right to build the Temple because of the many wars he waged. Violence seems to be a stain that cannot coexist with divine service.

Violence is never without consequences and can even have an impact on future generations. In Parshat Emor, the Torah tells us the story of a man who, finding no place among the various Hebrew encampments, blasphemed the divine name and was eventually put to death. The sages teach us that this man was none other than the son of that "*ish mitsri*" — Egyptian man — whom Moshe had killed. As the result of the relationship between this Egyptian and his Hebrew mother, he did not have the right to live among the descendants of his mother's tribe, which was passed on by the father. The

blasphemer, the bearer of multiple forms of violence — the violence of the relationship between his father and mother, the violence of his father's murder and the violence of his own rejection also “went out” (Lev 24:10) — but his going out, parallel to Moshe's, was a going out from the Hebrew people, whereas the prophet had returned to his people. An exit for an exit.

Finally, the midrash “*ptirat Moshe*” depicts a dialogue between God and Moshe in which the latter negotiates to postpone his death:

“I am better than all the others”, says Moshe. “Adam ate the fruit, Noah didn't intervene to save his generation, Abraham raised an evil man!”

God retorts *“You killed an Egyptian, the one who hit a Jew.”*

“I only killed one, how many have you killed!

“Moshe, I give life and I can take it back.”

This youthful sin was the final nail in Moshe's coffin, the one that would prevent him from reaching Israel once and for all. While Moshe had begun a radical transformation of his being, this led him to another extreme, which led him to murder. The ethical obligation towards my brothers and sisters cannot make me forget the one who then becomes Other, whom I struggle to recognize as my fellow man. The story of Moshe reminds us that we are constantly called upon to “step outside” ourselves, to extricate ourselves from our certainties, and to question those around us. Without falling into other certainties, because even the greatest among us had to pay the price.

* Co-founder with his wife Rabbanit Myriam Ackermann-Sommer of “Ayeka” in Paris, the first Modern Orthodox shul in France. Semikha Yeshivat Chovevi Torah 2023. Hebrew texts omitted because of difficulties keeping Hebrew consistent across word processing platforms.

Conspiracy Theories: Thoughts for Parashat Shemot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And he [Pharaoh] said to his people: Behold the people of the children of Israel are too many and too mighty for us...” (Shemot 1:9).

Pharaoh was ruler of a vast empire. The Israelites were a tiny group mainly living among themselves in Goshen. They posed no threat to Egypt. Yet the mighty Pharaoh somehow imagined that the Israelites were incredibly numerous and powerful and that he had to crush them before things got out of hand. He mobilized the Egyptian masses against the Israelites, leading to centuries of enslavement and suffering.

Pharaoh was the author of the earliest “conspiracy theory” against Israel. He fantasized outlandish charges, he apparently believed them, he promoted them, he acted based on them.

Did Pharaoh actually know any Israelites? Did the Egyptians who oppressed the Israelites have any personal relations with them?

As strange as it may seem, Pharaoh and the Egyptians — like most anti-Semites — focus not on real flesh-and-blood people. Rather they hate stereotypes that they create. They turn Israelites/Jews into things: oppressors, manipulators, dangerous enemies. Although these claims are incredibly foolish and not grounded in reality, that does not stop people from embracing them.

Why do they engage in hatred and vilification of people they don't even know, people who pose no real threat to them? Perhaps it is a manifestation of paranoia or jealousy. Perhaps it's a way to strengthen their own egos by diminishing others. In one of his essays, Umberto Eco suggests that human beings need enemies! It is through their enemies that they solidify their own identities.

Whatever the psychological reasons for fostering and believing conspiracy theories, humanity can only be redeemed by overcoming the corrosive evil of hatred. Although this seems like a far-fetched dream, it can happen.

Many years ago, a young lady came to my office to discuss the possibility of her conversion to Judaism. She was raised in Saudi Arabia to American parents in the American military. She grew up hating Israel and hating Jews although she had never met either an Israeli or a Jew.

When she reached college age, she came to the United States to study. She met Jewish students and found that they were nice people, not at all like the stereotypical Jews she had learned to hate as a child. She began to study Judaism. She learned about Jewish history and about modern Israel. She eventually met and fell in love with an Israeli man.

In due course, she converted to Judaism, married the Israeli, established a religiously traditional household, and had children who attended Jewish day schools when they came of age.

We discussed the remarkable transformation of her life from a hater of Jews and Israel, to an actively religious Jew married to an Israeli. In one of our conversations, she mused: "Wouldn't it be wonderful if all haters could suddenly find themselves in the shoes of the ones they hate? If only people really understood the hated victims by actually living as one of them!"

She came to this insight through her personal experiences. She overcame blind hatred by literally becoming one of those she had previously despised. She wished that all haters would at least try to see their victims as fellow human beings rather than as dehumanized stereotypes. If only people could replace their hatred with empathy!

While this is an important insight, it obviously eludes many people. Our societies are riddled with racism, anti-Semitism, anti-nationality x or anti-ethnicity y. It seems that many people prefer to hate rather than to empathize. They somehow imagine that they are stronger if they tear others down. They don't realize that by poisoning their lives with hatred, they undermine their own humanity.

Since the days of ancient Pharaoh, the people of Israel have been subjected to grotesque and hateful conspiracy theories. We continue to face such ugliness today. But we are a strong and resilient people, imbued with ultimate optimism for humanity. We value those human beings who choose love and understanding rather than hatred and vilification. We respect those who overcome hatred and who thereby contribute to the betterment of humanity.

The prophet Amos taught (8:11): "*Behold the days are coming and I [God] will send a famine to the land, not a famine for bread and not a thirst for water...but to hear the words of God.*"

We affirm this prophecy...and we wait for its fulfillment.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. Please share this Shabbat column with your family and friends, and please visit our website jewishideas.org for many articles that foster an intellectually vibrant, compassionate and inclusive Orthodox Judaism.

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York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its year end fund raising period. Thank you.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3191>

Hollow at the Center: Thoughts for Parashat Shemot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

“And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them” (Shemot 1:6-7).

As long as Joseph and his generation flourished, the children of Israel flourished. Amazingly, though, no sooner had that generation died off than the situation of the Israelites deteriorated dramatically.

We do not know the names of any Israelite leaders in the generation immediately after Joseph’s death. We know nothing about the Israelites’ communal organization, religious life, or social structure. The Torah gives us just a brief glimpse of that generation, and it only speaks of quantity: the Israelites multiplied tremendously... *“the land was filled with them.”*

What happened? Why was there no smooth transition of leadership from one generation to the next? Why did no one emerge as a national leader? Why did this vast number of people so easily become enslaved by Pharaoh? Where were their leaders, their statesmen, their warriors?

The Torah does not give a direct answer to these questions. But it does give an indirect answer.

In describing that generation, the Torah speaks only of quantity, not quality. It uses many words to tell us how numerous the Israelites were; it says nothing about the inner life of the people.

The message: the Israelites saw themselves in terms of quantity, not quality. They were affluent; they were successful; they filled the land with their presence and their influence. As they became self-absorbed with their material status, they lost sight of their spiritual foundations. When a nation defines its success by its numbers, when it forgets its spiritual content — it is a nation on the verge of disintegration.

Sometimes, we see nations or communities or institutions that appear so very strong. They count many members. They erect great buildings. They issue glitzy press releases in praise of their numeric strength and their wealth.

But these same nations, communities or institutions have lost sight of their *raison d’être*. While their founders were idealistic and courageous, the new generations have lost that spiritual dynamism. They have sunk into the morass of quantity, and they have forfeited the demand for quality. They appear strong — just as the numerous Israelites appeared to Pharaoh. But they are internally very weak. They produce no visionary leaders to guide them; they produce no courageous leaders to wage their battles. They simply have forgotten why they came into existence in the first place...and they fall into slavery all too easily.

In *Atlas Shrugged* by Ayn Rand, there is a passage about a boy who loved a great oak tree. *“He felt safe in the oak tree’s presence; it was a thing that nothing could change or threaten; it was his greatest symbol of strength.”* But one night, lightning struck the oak tree, splitting it in two. The next morning, the boy saw the fallen oak which had been rotten from within. In place of its core, it had hollowed out and had become frail. *“The trunk was only an empty shell; its heart had rotted away long ago; there was nothing inside...The living power had gone, and the shape it left had not been able to stand without it.”* Once the tree’s core turned rotten, it was doomed to break when a storm would hit it.

There are countries, communities, institutions — and people — who are like the oak tree in this story. They have the appearance of grandness and power; but they are rotting within. They gradually erode and become hollow. When they fall, people suddenly realize how badly they had been deceived by relying on quantity rather than quality.

In our world, it can be confusing to distinguish between a solid oak and an oak which is rotting at its core. Yet, if we cannot tell the difference, we are destined to great suffering and disillusionment.

The Torah reminds us not to judge success or strength by external numerical standards. The Israelites were not strong even though they multiplied in prodigious numbers. A hollow oak tree is not strong even if it is ancient and massive. No nation, community, institution or individual can be deemed to be strong unless the inner life is healthy.

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

<https://www.jewishideas.org/hollow-center-thoughts-parashat-shemot>

Shemos: Self-Awareness: When Do You Take Off Your Shoes?

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

Every day in our morning prayers we thank Hashem, “*Who provided all our needs.*” Tradition teaches that this is a blessing to thank Hashem for shoes. In fact, there is Halachic literature discussing whether we should recite this blessing on Tisha B’Av, a day that we do not wear regular leather shoes. Why do we equate shoes with “all our needs”?

While Hashem provides everything we have, He does so through messengers and conduits. In fact, as much as He provides, He often expects us to do our part. For example, if a person sits in front of a plate of food and says, “Well, if Hashem wants me to enjoy the food, He will feed me. Why should I bother picking up the fork and bringing the food to my mouth?” he is clearly a fool. Hashem did provide the food. He gave the cook the resources, wisdom, talent, and life itself to be able to prepare the food. He expects us to do our part to receive the gifts He gives.

Similarly, when Hashem provides for all our needs, He doesn’t necessarily place everything directly in our hands. More often, He makes everything available to us, but expects us to do our part. This includes that we might have to walk to where He makes things available to us. Shoes enable us to be mobile and do our part.

For the most part, shoes are part of a person’s dress. A person was made to do things, to accomplish, to move around. In fact, the Novi (Zecharia 3) describes a person as “*one who walks.*” In contrast to angels who cannot grow on their own merit, a person is one who goes.

In this week’s Parsha, as Moshe stood at Sinai in his own personal revelation with Hashem which preceded the grand national revelation, he was instructed to take off his shoes. The Medrash (Rabboh 2) explains, when a person is in an audience with Hashem, he must take off his shoes. This symbolizes that the current experience is one to be locked into. He has arrived. He is not wearing shoes as if to say that he is ready to move on. This is similar to the Kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash who served without shoes. When one is in the place of sanctity, one needs to savor the experience and not give the impression (by wearing shoes) that it is just a fleeting experience.

In contrast, when the Jews were ready to leave Mitzrayim, they were instructed to wear their walking shoes as they ate the Korban Pesach. This directive was part of the Exodus experience, recognizing that although they were still in Mitzrayim, they were “*one foot out the door.*”

Taking off a shoe has a different, remarkable symbolism in the Mitzva of Yibum. If a man dies without children, his brother is offered the opportunity to marry the widow and try to produce children. Those children would be considered the dead brother’s legacy. Interestingly, if he refuses to do this Mitzva, a procedure called Chalitza (the rejection ceremony) is

done. One of the steps in this procedure is that the widow takes off the living brother's shoe. She spits in his direction and declares that this ceremony deserves to be done to one who refuses to grant his brother a legacy.

An insight that we can appreciate regarding taking off the brother's shoe is that the same way that a shoe enables a person to be mobile and accomplish in this world, descendants enable a person's soul to continue living and accomplishing in this world for eternity. When the living brother refused to marry the deceased brother's wife, he was refusing to give his brother's soul shoes a living legacy of descendants in this world. Thus, his shoe is taken off as part of the Chalitza ceremony and the rebuke.

On Yom Kippur and Tisha B'Av we are prohibited to wear leather shoes as part of the affliction of the day. But the insight associated with these two days is very different. On Tisha B'Av, we consider how the loss of the Beis Hamikdash has deprived people of reaching their full potential. It is like we lack shoes to proceed and achieve things effectively. This is similar to the Chalitza insight of removing a shoe. In contrast, on Yom Kippur we can appreciate the symbolism of not wearing shoes as recognizing that we are in a Divine experience. We have arrived. Like Moshe and the Kohanim in the Beis Hamikdash we symbolize that there is no better place in which we would like to be.

There is much symbolism in wearing shoes, as well as in taking them off at the appropriate time. Shoes represent our being mobile, going, accomplishing, and receiving Hashem's blessing. But sometimes we take them off, to symbolize that we are in place. We could be in place in a good way, in a revelation moment. Or we can be in place because we feel stuck. We are really waiting to put on shoes again and move on in our journey.

A number of years ago I had the privilege of coaching a person who had been to some really nasty places in life, some by choice and some thrust upon him by life circumstances. By the time he came to me he had already made his way out of his intense crisis and was blessed to be a loving husband and father. I asked him what got him through the difficult times. He replied, *"Even when I was in the dumps, I knew that it wasn't where I wanted to be. It wasn't the place that I belonged. It therefore was not my end destination."* This is a person who — symbolically speaking — did not take off his shoes. Eventually, through that self-awareness, he was able to step out of his crisis.

It occurred to me that this self-awareness could be a new version of the Serenity Prayer. Many of us tap into the Serenity Prayer: *"We pray to change what we can change, to accept what we can't change, and the wisdom to know the difference."* A variation, focusing on self-awareness, is as follows:

We pray to know what is blessed and good, so that we savor it in our lives)symbolized by taking off our shoes if we have arrived(. We strive to live in the moment when we are experiencing goodness and blessing.

We pray to recognize what is not good in our lives and we hope to step out of)symbolized by wearing shoes, ready to move on(. We strive to patiently shift out of any ruts that we find ourselves in and move on.

And we pray for the wisdom to know the difference.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. For information or to join any Torah613 classes, contact Rabbi Rhine.

Parshas Shemos – Not As Small As It Seems

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer * © 2021

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.**]emphasis added[

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.

* Savannah Kollel; Congregation B’nai Brith Jacob, Savannah, GA. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD. Rabbi Singer will become Rosh Kollel next year.

Vayechi

by Rabbi Herzl Heftner *

]Rabbi Heftner did not send a new Dvar Torah for Miketz. Watch this space for further insights from Rabbi Heftner in future weeks.[

* Founder and dean of the Har'el Beit Midrash in Jerusalem. Rabbi Heftner is a graduate of Yeshiva University and was ordained at Yeshivat Har Etzion. For more of his writings, see www.har-el.org. To support the Beit Midrash, as we do, send donations to America Friends of Beit Midrash Har'el, 66 Cherry Lane, Teaneck, NJ 07666.

Midrashim on Shemot: Astrology and Blessings

By R. Haim Ovadia

A folk legend tells of a royal astrologer who fell from grace and was marked by his master, the king, as the next shooting star (for the firing squad). When the king asked the astrologer if he could predict his own expiration date, the terrified man answered that he would need some time for such a complicated calculation. The bemused king granted him his wish, and several days later the faithful servant returned with a sheaf of unintelligibly scribbled papers and told the king that the mission was almost impossible. "I was not able to determine the exact date of my physical departure from this blessed earth," he mumbled, "but I did find out that our fates and cosmic charts are intertwined, and that I will die exactly 24 hours before you, My Lord." Needless to say, the man was put immediately on the best healthcare policy available, was provided a personal butler, trainer and bodyguard, and was protected and cherished by the king till his (the king's) last day.

Not all astrologers can cover up so successfully for mistakes and failures, but they keep operating with the assumption that if predictions are broad and ambiguous enough, and if they are addressed to a wide enough crowd, they will be proven right, although coincidentally. With seven billion people living today, an average of 19 million share each birthday, 800,000 crowd each birth hour, and 13,000 can tell each other happy birth minute, so it is inevitable that some of the horoscope will be correct for some of them. In the following week, under the sign of Libra, Aries, or Cancer, they will travel, stay home, lose money, win the lottery, rekindle an old love, break up painfully, lose a dear one, and reconnect with long forgotten friends.

Imagine! If in our data driven, social sharing, scientifically minded world, where everything is analyzed, measured, counted and compared, people still believe in astrology, how much more so in ancient times and among pagan cultures where almost every non-human thing was a god or a demon. The ancient Jews were not spared that superstitious belief, as is evident from many biblical and rabbinical sources.

Some of the midrashic interpretations found in Rashi's commentary on the Book of Shemot are part of a most brilliant campaign against astrology. For example, Rashi comments on Pharaoh's decree that all Egyptians should throw all new born male babies into the Nile (Ex. 1:22), that the words "all Egyptians" are meant to include Egyptian babies. The Midrash, cited by Rashi, explains that although the astrologers were able to pinpoint the exact date of birth of the future redeemer, they could not tell whether he would be an Israelite or an Egyptian, and therefore all babies were indiscriminately killed.

The astrologers made another accurate prediction when they foresaw that the redeemer's nemesis was water and therefore suggested the Nile as the execution method of choice. In this Midrash, the rabbis mock and reject the vague and fake predictions of astrology. The author ridicules the Egyptian wizards who can determine the one day out of 365 which

is the birth date of the future redeemer, but not the one out of two possible nationalities)Israelite or Egyptian(, and as a result eliminate their own citizens. The Midrash also puts to shame the prediction about Moshe suffering because of water, which turned out to be correct only 120 years later, when Moshe was denied entrance to Canaan because of the incident of Mei Meriva)drawing water from the rock(.

What we thought was a manifestation of the Egyptians' amazing astrological predicting ability turned out to be an illusion, a cerebral sleight of hand, a method which has been successfully used throughout the ages to con the naïve and those who want to believe. A different angle of attack on astrology can be found in Rashi's commentary on Parashat Bo)Ex. 10:10(. Pharaoh warns Moshe that evil will befall him if he insists on leaving Egypt with women and children. Rashi quotes a midrash which latches into the word רעה – evil:

I have heard a midrash. There is a star named רעה which signals death and bloodshed. Pharaoh told them that through his astrology he sees that star rising against the Israelites in the desert.

When the Israelites sinned and made the golden calf, God wanted to kill them. Moshe then said)Ex. 32:12(, why would]You let[the Egyptians say that You took]the Israelites[out in רעה... God accepted Moshe's argument and turned the bloodshed into circumcision.

The Midrash makes use of the word רעה to suggest that even when it seems that astrology is valid, it has no real power. It is man's actions which determine his faith. The Israelites were about to suffer because of their sin, and Moshe's prayer changed the decree. The circumcision is viewed, in this Midrash, as a positive act of shedding blood which substitutes for a punishment, but this is not the main point. Rather, it is the idea that our fate is not decided by the zodiac signs, and that what the Egyptian astrologers predicted was either vague or changeable.

The Torah and the prophets warn us repeatedly not to heed astrology)see esp. Jer. 10:2(, and the rabbis, in those carefully crafted Midrash, came to reinforce it. I would like to add that fake prophecies still exist today in the form of pseudo-kabbalists, seers, rabbis visited by "dreams" and visions and more. To all those who are at times desperate and go to seek advice, blessing or prayers, I can offer one received from my grandfather Hakham Shaul Fetaya, who heard it from his father, the great Kabbalist Hakham Yehuda Fetaya ZT"ל:

Never seek advice, prayers or blessings from one who asks for something in return. Even if you ask to be blessed with a baby boy and in return to granting your wish the Rabbi only asks to be a sandak at the Bris, and even if the rabbi suggests that you give charity to specific institutions. You could always turn to HaShem and pray directly to him without mediators and middlemen, and the only way to accept a suggestion to donate is if you are told that you can give whenever you want to the charity or cause of your choice, and even that, not as a condition for the blessing.

We believe that HaShem is close to us and we can communicate with Him without the aid of intermediaries and representatives. May He grant us blessings and give us energy to do good and help others selflessly.

Shabbat Shalom

* Torah VeAhava. Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan)Potomac, MD(and faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school. **New: Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria.** The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats.

Exploring the Matrix and Chinese Food

By Rabbi Moshe Rube * © 2022

]Rabbi Rube and the Aukland Hebrew Congregation are closed for three weeks for summer vacation. During this period, I am reprinting a Dvar Torah from Rabbi Rube's archives.

*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

P.S. I loosely took the smiling example from the words of renowned Jewish mentalist and expert on body language Marc Salem (aka Moshe Potwinick).

P.S. Suggestions for Further Reading: Konrad Lorenz in his book *On Aggression* analyzes the facial expressions and movement of different animals when their intentions conflict. There's a fascinating photo on p. 92 where he analyzes quantitatively the face of a wolf as it goes from a completely calm expression all the way to a fully aggressive expression with the middle being the most conflicted. I have taken a photo of it below if you want to look. [photo not included here]

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Rav Kook Torah Shemot: Moses' Mistake

Appearing in a burning bush, God charged Moses with the task of leading the Jewish people out of Egypt. Moses, however, had doubts about the feasibility of the mission:

“They will not believe me and they will not listen to me, because they will say, ‘God did not appear to you.’”)Ex. 4:1(

In fact, Moses was wrong. The Hebrew slaves did believe him. Why did Moses doubt God’s plan? How could the “master of all prophets” so gravely misjudge his own people?

Another curiosity is the nature of the miraculous signs God provided Moses to prove his authenticity — a staff that transforms into a snake, a hand that becomes leprous, and fresh water that turns into blood. None of these are particularly auspicious omens!

Hidden Treasure of the Soul

What is faith? The wonderful trait of emunah (faith), in its purest form, is a hidden quality of the soul. It is unlike any other wisdom or intellectual awareness. It is an integral part of the inner soul, forming the very basis for life, its light and splendor.

However, this source of happiness and eternal life is not always discernible to the outside world. We are not even fully aware of the magnitude of our own resources of faith. Certainly, its true dimensions are concealed from others.

The Israelites in Egypt had sunk to the lowest levels of corruption and idolatry. Outwardly, they were indistinguishable from their Egyptian masters. The two nations were so similar that the Torah describes the Exodus from Egypt as “*taking a nation from the midst of a nation*”)Deut. 4:34(. It was like removing a fetus encapsulated in its mother’s womb.

In such a state of affairs, even the penetrating eye of Moses failed to detect the people’s inner reserve of faith. Too many masks and covers concealed the holy light of their inner faith. This hidden treasure of the Jewish people, their eternal heritage, was only revealed to God. The Sages taught in Shabbat 97a,

“God knew that Israel would believe. He told Moses, ‘They are believers, the children of believers. But you will lack faith in the future!’ As it says)Num. 20:12(]regarding the incident at Mei Merivah, the Waters of Dispute[, ‘You did not believe in Me, to sanctify Me in the presence of the Israelites.’”

Unquestionably, the inner fire of faith always burns in the soul. It is an intrinsic aspect of the Jewish soul, regardless of choices made and paths taken. If we judge only according to external actions, however, there may not be any outward expression of this inner spark. This was God’s message to Moses: if you measure faith only by what occurs in the outer realm of deed, then even the greatest and most perfected individuals — even spiritual giants like Moses — can stumble, and fail to act upon their inner faith.

The Message of the Signs

The Sages explained that the various signs were a punishment for being unjustly suspicious of the people. The sign of leprosy was particularly appropriate for the message that God wanted to impart to Moses. Leprosy afflicts the skin, the outer layer of the body. This sign hinted to Moses: there may occur imperfections on the exterior, and the external expression may not match the inner holiness, but the holy light of divine faith is always safeguarded within the inner soul.

One cannot claim that the Jewish people will not believe the word of God, even when their lives appear dark and tarnished. This discoloration is only superficial, as it is written, “*Do not look upon me]disdainfully[because I am black; for]it is only[the sun that has darkened me*”)Song of Songs 1:6(.

)*Gold from the Land of Israel*, pp. 103-105. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, pp. 241-242.(

The Light at the Heart of Darkness (5769, 5770, 5779)

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

She is one of the most unexpected heroes of the Hebrew Bible. Without her, Moses might not have lived. The whole story of the exodus would have been different. Yet she was not an Israelite. She had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by her courage. Yet she seems to have had no doubt, experienced no misgivings, made no hesitation. If it was Pharaoh who afflicted the children of Israel, it was another member of his own family who saved the decisive vestige of hope: Pharaoh's daughter. Recall the context. Pharaoh had decreed death for every male Israelite child. Yocheved, Amram's wife, had a baby boy. For three months she was able to conceal his existence, but no longer. Fearing his certain death if she kept him, she set him afloat on the Nile in a basket, hoping against hope that someone might see him and take pity on him. This is what follows:

Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile, while her maids walked along the Nile's edge. She saw the box in the reeds and sent her slave-girl to fetch it. Opening it, she saw the boy. The child began to cry, and she had pity on it. *"This is one of the Hebrew boys,"* she said)Ex. 2:6(.

Note the sequence. First she sees that it is a child and has pity on it. A natural, human, compassionate reaction. Only then does it dawn on her who the child must be. Who else would abandon a child? She remembers her father's decree against the Hebrews. Instantly the situation has changed. To save the baby would mean disobeying the royal command. That would be serious enough for an ordinary Egyptian; doubly so for a member of the royal family.]1[

Nor is she alone when the event happens. Her maids are with her; her slave-girl is standing beside her. She must face the risk that one of them, in a fit of pique, or even mere gossip, will tell someone about it. Rumours flourish in royal courts. Yet she does not shift her ground. She does not tell one of her servants to take the baby and hide it with a family far away. She has the courage of her compassion. She does not flinch. Now something extraordinary happens:

The]child's[sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, *"Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?"* "Go," replied Pharaoh's daughter. The young girl went and got the child's own mother. *"Take this child and nurse it,"* said Pharaoh's daughter. "I will pay you a fee." *The woman took the child and nursed it.*)Ex. 2:7-9(

The simplicity with which this is narrated conceals the astonishing nature of this encounter. First, how does a child – not just a child, but a member of a persecuted people – have the audacity to address a princess? There is no elaborate preamble, no "Your royal highness" or any other formality of the kind we are familiar with elsewhere in biblical narrative. They seem to speak as equals.

Equally pointed are the words left unsaid. *"You know and I know,"* Moses' sister implies, *"who this child is; it is my baby brother."* She proposes a plan brilliant in its simplicity. If the real mother is able to keep the child in her home to nurse him, we both minimise the danger. You will not have to explain to the court how this child has suddenly appeared.

We will be spared the risk of bringing him up: we can say the child is not a Hebrew, and that the mother is not the mother but only a nurse. Miriam's ingenuity is matched by Pharaoh's daughter's instant agreement. She knows; she understands; she gives her consent.

Then comes the final surprise:

When the child matured,]his mother[brought him to Pharaoh's daughter. She adopted him as her own son, and named him Moses. "I bore him from the water," she said.)Ex. 2:10(

Pharaoh's daughter did not simply have a moment's compassion. She has not forgotten the child. Nor has the passage of time diminished her sense of responsibility. Not only does she remain committed to his welfare; she adopts the riskiest of strategies. She will adopt him and bring him up as her own son.]2[This is courage of a high order.

Yet the single most surprising detail comes in the last sentence. In the Torah, it is parents who give a child its name, and in the case of a special individual, God Himself. It is God who gives the name Isaac to the first Jewish child; God's angel who gives Jacob the name Israel; God who changes the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. We have already encountered one adoptive name – Tzafenat Pa'neach – the name by which Joseph was known in Egypt; yet Joseph remains Joseph. How surpassingly strange that the hero of the exodus, greatest of all the prophets, should bear not the name Amram and Yocheved have undoubtedly used thus far, but the one given to him by his adoptive mother, an Egyptian princess. A Midrash draws our attention to the fact:

This is the reward for those who do kindness. Although Moses had many names, the only one by which he is known in the whole Torah is the one given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. Even the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call him by any other name.]3[

Indeed Moshe – Meses – is an Egyptian name, meaning “child,” as in Ramses)which means child of Ra; Ra was the greatest of the Egyptian gods(.

Who then was Pharaoh's daughter? Nowhere is she explicitly named. However the *First Book of Chronicles*)4:18(mentions a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she the Sages identified as the woman who saved Moses. The name Bitya)sometimes rendered as Batya(means “*the daughter of God*.” From this, the Sages drew one of their most striking lessons: “*The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: 'Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You are not My daughter, but I shall call you My daughter.'*”]4[They added that she was one of the few people)tradition enumerates nine(who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.]5[

Instead of “*Pharaoh's daughter*” read “*Hitler's daughter*” or “*Stalin's daughter*” and we see what is at stake. Tyranny cannot destroy humanity. Moral courage can sometimes be found in the heart of darkness. That the Torah itself tells the story the way it does has enormous implications. It means that when it comes to people, we must never generalise, never stereotype. **The Egyptians were not all evil: even from Pharaoh himself a heroine was born.** Nothing could signal more powerfully that the Torah is not an ethnocentric text; that we must recognise virtue wherever we find it, even among our enemies; and that the basic core of human values – humanity, compassion, courage – is truly universal. Holiness may not be; goodness is.]Emphasis added[

Outside Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, is an avenue dedicated to righteous gentiles. Pharaoh's daughter is a supreme symbol of what they did and what they were. I, for one, am profoundly moved by that encounter on the banks of the Nile between an Egyptian princess and a young Israelite child, Moses' sister Miriam. The contrast between them – in terms of age, culture, status and power – could not be greater. Yet their deep humanity bridges all the differences, all the distance. Two heroines. May they inspire us.

FOOTNOTES:

]1[“Seeing that she]Pharaoh's daughter[wanted to save Moses, they]her handmaids[said to her, ‘Mistress, it is customary that when a king of flesh and blood issues a decree, even if the whole world does not fulfil it, at least his children and the members of his household fulfill it. Yet you transgress your father's decree!’”)Sotah 12b(

]2[On the adoption of a foundling in the ancient world, see Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus*)New York: Schocken, 1986(, 31–32

]3[Shemot Rabbah 1:26

]4[Vayikra Rabbah 1:3

]5[Derekh Eretz Zuta 1

Around the Sabbath Table:

]1[Is the decision Pharaoh's daughter took a heroic act or the least we could expect of any human in such a situation?

]2[Was Miriam also a hero in this story?

]3[What is the message of the Midrash when it points out that Moses was only ever known by his Egyptian name Moshe?

]4[What message are the Sages giving us when they identify Pharaoh's daughter as "Batya"?

]5[What message from this week's Covenant & Conversation made the biggest impact on you?

<https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemot/the-light-at-the-heart-of-darkness/>

Hearing the Cry and Acting on It

By Katia Bolotin * © Chabad 2024

There is a Torah concept of "*a descent for the sake of an ascent.*"¹ The descent acts as a springboard to launch that which is falling upwards. Moreover, the descent is, in fact, a necessary preparation for the ascent, and its ultimate purpose is the ascent; the descent is nothing other than a part of the ascent itself.² Through this spiritual lens, Israel's exile down to Egypt can be viewed as the prelude to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.³

Doing Right by Doing Wrong

Consider the life of Moses. Born during Pharaoh's decree of male infanticide against all babies, Moses's survival was against all odds. These were desperate times indeed. In what might be considered the first recorded act of civil disobedience,⁴ midwives Shifra and Puah, whom our sages identify as Moses's mother (Yocheved) and sister (Miriam), selflessly endangered their lives by boldly assisting Hebrew mothers safely deliver their babies in defiance of Pharaoh's brutal decree.⁵

As we know from the narrative, when she felt that she no longer could hide her baby, Yocheved relinquished her infant son to Divine Providence by placing Moses in the Nile River inside a waterproof basket. As Miriam stood watching from a distance, an astounding occurrence took place. Pharaoh's daughter and her handmaids appeared. In an unpredictable turn of events, Pharaoh's daughter rescued what was clearly an endangered Hebrew baby, while her own handmaid reprimanded her for blatantly transgressing the law.⁶ Pharaoh's daughter listened to her conscience, thereby defying her father.

Hearing the Cry

"She ... saw him, the child, and behold, a youth was crying" (Exodus 2:6).

A puzzling discrepancy comes to light in the wording of this verse. It first describes the three-month old Moses as "*the child*" (hayeled) and then speaks of a "*youth*" (na'ar). Every word in the Torah is deliberate, so how are we supposed to understand these words? Rashi explains that both terms refer to Moses who, although just a baby, had a cry that sounded like that of a fully grown boy.

Baal HaTurim, however, presents a fascinating counter-interpretation.⁷ He agrees that “*the child*” (*hayeled*) refers to Moses, but proposes that the crying “*youth*” (*na’ar*) is actually Moses’s older brother, Aaron. He derives this from a gematria — a method of revealing numerical correspondence between Hebrew words in the Torah. The words “*youth cries*” (*na’ar bocheh*) are numerically equivalent to “*Aaron, the Priest*” (*Aharon ha-Cohen*).

This understanding presents a broader perspective through which past and present events connect. Two events, occurring many years apart, are profoundly connected in time. Joseph’s brothers threw him into a pit. As Joseph cried out, they chose not to listen, deafening their ears to his despair. This cruelty became the catalyst that led to Joseph’s and, later, their own descent into Egypt. By contrast, Aaron’s tearful response to his brother’s plight set off a parallel reaction from above. Divine Providence interceded, overriding the natural order of things.

Now, we can better understand why Pharaoh’s daughter appeared just at the right time. We can perceive the hidden force that propelled her to radically reject her father’s harsh decree. Without the cries of Aaron and the courage of Yocheved, Miriam and Pharaoh’s daughter, there may not have been a Moses.

Taking Time to Notice

There are pivotal times in our lives when we’re given the choice of whether or not to change our direction or, perhaps, seem forced to make a change. At times, a change may appear to be a setback, as when Joseph was sold into slavery or Moses became a fugitive, fleeing for his life. But as we can see from these examples, the setback may just be a setup for a greater purpose that takes time to be revealed.

Seeing beyond the status quo and taking action are characteristics that distinguish great people. These traits can also distinguish you and me.

Strive to find purpose even while you wait. We’re not merely human beings; we are human “*becomings*.”

Challenge yourself to become more. When things seem down, know that tomorrow they could start to rise. If you should find yourself plagued by crisis or trauma and your faith is put to the test, try to remember: Every descent is for the sake of a greater ascent.

Making It Relevant

]1[Think about positive steps you can take to remain resolute in your faith, even when being put to the test.

]2[Recognize the pattern of downs and ups in your life. What have you learned? How have you grown?

]3[Don’t be afraid to stand up for what you know is right, even if it seems to go against societal “norms.”

]4[Use “setbacks” as “setups” for personal, spiritual or societal growth.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Makkot 7b.

2. See more on this concept in this essay, *On the Essence of Ritual Impurity*.

3. See *Torah Ohr, Shemot* explaining the verse in Ex. 3:12. And G d said, “*I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship G d on this mountain.*”

4. Sacks, Jonathan, *Essays of Ethics* (Jerusalem, Maggid Press: 2016), p. 80. See also this article.

5. Talmud Sotah, 11b.
6. Talmud Sotah, 12b.
7. Ba'al HaTurim in Exodus 2:6.

* Motovational author, pianist, songwriter, and composer of contemporary classical music

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5753261/jewish/Hearing-the-Cry-and-Acting-on-It.htm

Shemot: The Antidote to Slander

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

The Antidote to Slander

Joseph bound the sons of Israel by an oath, saying "G-d will deliver you, and you must take up my G-d said to Moses, "Reach out and grasp its tail." When he reached out and took hold of it, it turned into a staff in his hand.)Ex. 4:4(

When Moses told G-d that he doubted that the Jewish people would believe him, G-d told him to cast his staff to the ground. When Moses did so, the staff turned into a snake. By making the staff turn specifically into a snake, G-d hinted to Moses that he was guilty of slander, just as the primordial snake had slandered G-d to Eve.

)The snake convinced Eve that rather than for their own good, G-d forbade Adam and her to eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge because He was jealously reserving for Himself the aspect of perfecting the world that they would be able to participate in were they to eat this fruit.(

Now, the Torah does not speak disparagingly of anyone unless there is a reason to do so. It points out Moses' error in order to teach us how severe an offense it is to speak disparagingly of others and how it is possible to make amends for doing so.

G-d showed Moses that it is possible to rectify the sin of slander by grasping the snake's tail. The tail, the hindmost part of the animal, indicates lowliness and humility. By humbling our ego, we eliminate the haughtiness that makes us see faults in others.

— from *Daily Wisdom 3*

May G-d grant a swift, miraculous and complete victory over our enemies.

Gut Shabbos and a bright and joyous Chanukah,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

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Covenant and Conversation

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Turning Curses into Blessings

Genesis ends on an almost serene note. Jacob has found his long lost son. The family has been reunited. Joseph has forgiven his brothers. Under his protection and influence the family has settled in Goshen, one of the most prosperous regions of Egypt. They now have homes, property, food, the protection of Joseph and the favour of Pharaoh. It must have seemed one of the golden moments of Abraham's family's history.

Then, as has happened so often since, "There arose a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph." There was a political climate change. The family fell out of favour. Pharaoh told his advisers: "Look, the Israelite people are becoming too numerous and strong for us" [1] – the first time the word "people" is used in the Torah with reference to the children of Israel. "Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase." And so the whole mechanism of oppression moves into operation: forced labour that turns into slavery that becomes attempted genocide.

The story is engraved in our memory. We tell it every year, and in summary-form in our prayers, every day. It is part of what it is to be a Jew. Yet there is one phrase that shines out from the narrative: "But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." That, no less than oppression itself, is part of what it means to be a Jew.

The worse things get, the stronger we become. Jews are the people who not only survive but thrive in adversity.

Jewish history is not merely a story of Jews enduring catastrophes that might have spelled the end to less tenacious groups. It is that after every disaster, Jews renewed themselves. They discovered some hitherto hidden reservoir of spirit that fuelled new forms of collective self-expression as the carriers of God's message to the world.

Every tragedy begat new creativity. After the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon came the great literary prophets, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Out of the destruction of the First Temple and the

Babylonian exile came the renewal of Torah in the life of the nation, beginning with Ezekiel and culminating in the vast educational programme brought back to Israel by Ezra and Nehemiah. From the destruction of the Second Temple came the immense literature of rabbinic Judaism, until then preserved mostly in the form of an oral tradition: Mishnah, Midrash and Gemara.

From the Crusades came the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the North European school of piety and spirituality. Following the Spanish expulsion came the mystic circle of Tzefat: Lurianic Kabbalah and all it inspired by way of poetry and prayer. From East European persecution and poverty came the Hassidic movement and its revival of grass-roots Judaism through a seemingly endless flow of story and song. And from the worst tragedy of all in human terms, the Holocaust, came the rebirth of the state of Israel, the greatest collective Jewish affirmation of life in more than two thousand years.

It is well known that the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" also means "opportunity". Any civilisation that can see the blessing within the curse, the fragment of light within the heart of darkness, has within it the capacity to endure. Hebrew goes one better. The word for crisis, mashber, also means "a child-birth chair." Written into the semantics of Jewish consciousness is the idea that the pain of hard times is a collective form of the contractions of a woman giving birth. Something new is being born. That is the mindset of a people of whom it can be said that "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread."

Where did it come from, this Jewish ability to turn weakness into strength, adversity into advantage, darkness into light? It goes back to the moment in which our people received its name, Israel. It was then, as Jacob wrestled alone at night with an angel, that as dawn broke his adversary begged him to let him go. "I will not let you go until you bless me", said Jacob. (Bereishit 32:27) That is the source of our peculiar, distinctive obstinacy. We may have fought all night. We may be tired and on the brink of exhaustion. We may find ourselves limping, as did Jacob. Yet we will not let our adversary go until we have extracted a blessing from the encounter. This turned out to be not a minor and temporary concession. It became the basis of his new name and our identity. Israel, the people who "wrestled with God and man and prevailed", is the nation that grows stronger with each conflict and catastrophe.

I was reminded of this unusual national characteristic by an article that appeared in the British press in October 2015. Israel at the time was suffering from a wave of terrorist attacks that saw Palestinians murdering innocent civilians in streets and bus stations throughout the country. It began with these words: "Israel is an astonishing country, buzzing with energy and confidence, a magnet for talent and investment – a cauldron of innovation." It spoke of its world-class excellence in aerospace, clean-tech, irrigation systems, software, cyber-security, pharmaceuticals and defence systems. [2]

"All this", the writer went on to say, "derives from brainpower, for Israel has no natural resources and is surrounded by hostile neighbours." The country is living proof of "the power of technical education, immigration and the benefits of the right sort of military service." Yet this cannot be all, since Jews have consistently overachieved, wherever they were and whenever they were given the chance. He goes through the various suggested explanations: the strength of Jewish families, their passion for education, a desire for self-employment, risk-taking as a way of life, and even ancient history. The Levant was home to the world's first agricultural societies and earliest traders. Perhaps, then, the disposition to enterprise was written, thousands of years ago, into Jewish DNA. Ultimately, though, he concludes that it has to do with "culture and communities".

A key element of that culture has to do with the Jewish response to crisis. To every adverse circumstance, those who have inherited Jacob's sensibilities insist: "I will not let you go until you bless me." (Bereishit 32:27) That is how Jews, encountering the Negev, found ways of making the desert bloom. Seeing a barren, neglected landscape elsewhere, they planted trees and forests. Faced with hostile armies on all their borders, they developed military technologies they then turned to peaceful use. War and terror forced them to develop medical expertise and world-leading skills in dealing with the aftermath of trauma.

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They found ways of turning every curse into a blessing. The historian Paul Johnson, as always, put it eloquently:

Over 4,000 years the Jews proved themselves not only great survivors but extraordinarily skilful in adapting to the societies among which fate had thrust them, and in gathering whatever human comforts they had to offer. No people has been more fertile in enriching poverty or humanising wealth, or in turning misfortune to creative account.^[3]

There is something profoundly spiritual as well as robustly practical about this ability to transform the bad moments of life into a spur to creativity. It is as if, deep within us were a voice saying, "You are in this situation, bad though it is, because there is a task to perform, a skill to acquire, a strength to develop, a lesson to learn, an evil to redeem, a shard of light to be rescued, a blessing to be uncovered, for I have chosen you to give testimony to humankind that out of suffering can come great blessings if you wrestle with it for long enough and with unshakeable faith."

In an age in which people of violence are committing acts of brutality in the name of the God of compassion, the people of Israel are proving daily that this is not the way of the God of Abraham, the God of life and the sanctity of life. And whenever we who are a part of that people lose heart, and wonder when it will ever end, we should recall the words: "The more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." A people of whom that can be said can be injured, but can never be defeated. God's way is the way of life. *[5777]*

[1] Ex. 1:9. This is the first intimation in history of what in modern times took the form of the Russian forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In the Diaspora, Jews – powerless – were often seen as all-powerful. What this usually means, when translated, is: How is it that Jews manage to evade the pariah status we have assigned to them?

[2] Luke Johnson, 'Animal Spirits: Israel and its tribe of risk-taking entrepreneurs,' Sunday Times, 4 October 2015.

[3] Paul Johnson, *The History of the Jews*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p. 58

The Person in the Parsha **Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb**

Spiritual Time Management

The two old men couldn't have been more different from each other. Yet they both taught me the identical life lesson.

The first, a cagey old Irishman, was one of my mentors in the postgraduate psychotherapy training program in which I was enrolled many years ago. He wrote quite a few books in his day, but they are all out of print now and nearly forgotten, like so many other wise writings.

The other was an aged Rabbi, several of whose Yiddish discourses I was privileged to hear in person. He was but moderately famous in his lifetime, but is much more well-known

nowadays because of the popularity of his posthumously published writings.

The lesson was about the importance of time management. Neither of these two elderly gentlemen used that term, which is of relatively recent coinage. Yet their words, while far fewer than the words of the numerous contemporary popular books on the subject of time management, made a lifelong impression upon me.

It was long after my encounter with these elderly gentlemen that I first realized that their lesson was implicit in a verse in this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shemot.

The Irishman, we'll call him Dr. McHugh, was a master psychotherapist with fifty years of experience under his belt. A small group of us gathered in his office every Tuesday evening. We went there not only for his wisdom, but for the warm and comfortable furnishings and splendid view of the city of Washington, D.C.

Dr. McHugh was an existentialist philosophically. He was heavily influenced by his encounters with Martin Buber, and because of this, he felt a special affinity to me, thinking that since Buber and I were both Jewish, we must have had much in common. He wasn't aware that my Judaism was very different from Buber's, but I wasn't about to disabuse him of his assumption.

He was a diligent and persistent teacher and, true to his philosophical perspective, doggedly encouraged us to appreciate the human core of the patients we were treating. He was convinced that he had a foolproof method of comprehending that human core. "Tell me how the patient uses his time, how he organizes his daily schedule, and I will tell you the secret foundation of his soul."

Dr. McHugh firmly believed that you knew all you needed to know about a person if you knew how he used his time. Or, as he put it, "if he used his time, and how he used it." He would then make his lesson more personal, and would ask, carefully making eye contact with each of us, "How do you busy yourself?"

In the summer following that postgraduate course, I took advantage of the rare opportunity of hearing the ethical discourses, the mussar shmuessen, of the revered Rabbi Elya Lapian. He too spoke of the fundamental importance of one's use of time, and he too, though he did not even know the term, was quite an existentialist.

He began his remarks quietly, almost in a whisper. Gradually his voice reached its crescendo, and when it did, he uttered the words I will never forget: "Der velt sagt," he said in Yiddish, "the world says that time is money. But I say time is life!" I was a young man then, but not too young to appreciate the profound meaningfulness of that simple statement. Time is life.

Likutei Divrei Torah

He went on to say that we all allow ourselves to become busy, and busyness detracts from life.

It was quite a few years later that it dawned upon me that the Irish psychiatrist and the Jewish spiritual guide were preceded in their teaching by the 18th century ethicist and mystic, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato, known by the initials of his name as the Ramchal. Furthermore, the Ramchal was preceded in antiquity by none other than the Pharaoh himself.

In the second chapter of his widely studied ethical treatise, *Mesillat Yesharim*, Path of the Upright, Ramchal writes of the tactics of the yetzer, the personification of the evil urge which is buried within each of us:

"A man who goes through life without taking the time to consider his ways is like a blind man who walks along the edge of a river... This is, in fact, one of the cunning artifices of the evil yetzer, who always imposes upon men such strenuous tasks that they have no time left to note whether they are drifting. For he knows that, if they would pay the least attention to their conduct, they would change their ways instantly..."

"This ingenuity is somewhat like that of Pharaoh, who commanded, 'Let the heavier work be laid upon the men, that they may labor therein, and let them not regard lying words' (Exodus 5:9). For Pharaoh's purpose was not only to prevent the Israelites from having any leisure to make plans or take counsel against him, but by subjecting them to unceasing toil, to deprive them also of the opportunity to reflect."

To become so busy and have no time to reflect, no time to really live, is bondage. Ramchal's insight into Pharaoh's scheme epitomizes the essential nature of our years of exile in Egypt. To have no time, that is slavery.

How prescient were the words of Rav Elya Lapian. Time is life. And how germane is his teaching for contemporary man, who despite the "time-saving" technological devices which surround him is even busier than those who came before him. Contemporary man has no time for himself, certainly no quality time, and thus no life.

Time is life. Millennia ago, an Egyptian tyrant knew this secret. Centuries ago, an Italian Jewish mystic was keenly aware of it. Decades ago, I learned it from a Gentile existentialist psychiatrist and a gentle and pious rabbi. It is the secret of spiritual time management, and it is the secret of life. Would that we would learn it today.

How to Raise a Moses

The birth of Moses, which is described in this morning's scriptural reading, is mentioned by the Rabbis in a most interesting and extraordinary Talmudic passage (Song of Songs Rabba 1:3). They aver that Rabbi Judah the Prince, known as Rebbe, was "yosheiv vedoresh," preaching to his congregation. And as he was so doing, he was faced with a most distressing problem that has presented itself to generations of public speakers, and especially rabbis and preachers: "nitnanem hatzibbur," "his audience began to fall asleep." To this day, that is a major problem that is rather difficult to solve. Even the very best speaker always has one or two people in his audience who prefer a cozy nap to challenging oratory, and who find more consolation in dozing than in thinking. It is sometimes fascinating to watch heads nod and eyes grow heavy, even before the speaker has opened his mouth. When, however, the entire congregation starts to doze off, that is a bad situation. And so, moved by the speaker's instincts, Rebbe "bakeish le'ororan," "he tried to wake them up."

How do you wake up a sleeping congregation? Some speakers merely raise their voices. Trusting in volume more than in quality, they shout their listeners out of sleep. Other, and more modern brands of rabbis, turn sensational, and they change themes to the Kinsey-review type of talk. Perhaps that will keep them awake. It is a kind of sensationalism that works at times. But a Rebbe – a saint and a scholar – does not rely on such techniques. He relies on other kinds of methods. And so, he said: "yalda isha beMitzrayim shishim ribo bekeres ahaf," "one Jewish woman in Egypt gave birth to 600,000 children at one time." A rather sensational remark. And it is meticulously recorded by our Rabbis that at least one of his listeners was jolted by this piece of intelligence, and his name was Yishmael ben Rabbi Yose, and he asked Rebbe what he meant by that, and how it was possible. And Rebbe replied, "zu Yokheved sheyalda et Moshe sheshakul keneged shishim ribo shel Yisrael," the woman was Yocheved, mother of Moses, who bore Moses, who was as worthy and weighty as the 600,000 Jews he led out of Egypt to freedom and Revelation.

It is, indeed, a sensational remark. It is sensational that a woman can be blessed with a son who can lead and spark and inspire and teach a whole nation. It is sensational for parents to be the lucky parents of a Moses. Not everyone has that good fortune. And yet, all parents ask themselves and ask others, what do we have to do to deserve great children – not just well-adjusted children who will follow the lead of everyone else, not just children who will be colorlessly "normal," who will never rise higher than the pitifully low average and remain happy in their ignorance and

commonness – but children who will serve and inspire and lead and achieve for a whole people and a whole world? How can parents deserve that kind of child? How can they become parents of Moseses? That is the question. And the only way to answer that question is to learn something about Amram, the father of Moses, and Yocheved – she who, according to Rebbe, gave birth to 600,000 at one time. Three qualities will become clear to us, three qualities possessed by the parents of Moses that can be emulated by modern adults who wish to be proud forebears of great progeny.

The first prerequisite for seeing greatness in your child is to have some of it yourself. Superiority and greatness are not spontaneously generated. A child must be able to observe, subconsciously, the personalities and conduct of his parents. Only then can he build on that foundation. Before a child can flower into greatness, he must receive a seed of it from his parents.

Thus, Amram is described in our Rabbinic literature (Midrash Sekhel Tov, Exodus, ch. 2), as "gedol Yisrael ugedol ha'aretz," "a great Jew and a great man." He was a leader of his people, and though he never attained a tenth of his son's greatness and renown, nevertheless, his own superiority was something which Moses was able to develop further. Yocheved is known as "isha tzadkanit," a most pious and righteous woman (Sota 11b). Only when a mother is devout can her son become a true saint, a Moses.

Basically, therefore, it is important for parents to remember that the way to raise great children is not to forsake their own development. By concentrating solely on their children's development and completely neglecting their own, parents give children the impression that study and achievement and religion and the like are only for children. Why, then, should they continue to practice it when they come of age? For a child to be studious, he must see his father and mother reading and studying. For a child to be generous, he must see generosity in his parents. For a child to be sincere and hard-working, he must notice at least a trace of it in his elders. Prerequisite number one, then, for great children, is un-petty and un-small parents – adults who themselves aspire to self-development.

The second quality goes a step further. Not only must a father and mother each be superior in his and her own right, but they must be magnanimous towards each other. In other words, there must be a good, peaceful, happy, and loving home. An exemplary Jewish home is a splendid way of assuring eminent children. Our Rabbis said (Shabbat 23b) that "haragil beneir hayyen lei banim talmidei hakhamim," "a woman who faithfully observes the requirement to light the Sabbath candles will have children who will be scholars." Why? Because, as we know, the neirot Shabbat

Likutei Divrei Torah

are the symbol of shalom bayit, of domestic happiness and conjugal bliss. Where there is a good home, there will be good children.

Listen to the Bible's description of the origins of Moses: "vayelekh ish mibeit Levi vayikah et bat Levi," a man from the tribe of Levi married a woman from the same tribe (Exodus 2:1). That is all. No fanfare, no deification of the parents, no ascension to heaven, no beatification or official sainthood for his father or his mother. And, as the Zohar points out, not even their names are given in this simple account! It is all betzina, all in modesty and humbleness and quietness. That is the true mark of a good Jewish home – tzina. It is a quiet and peaceful, unnoisy, and gentle home. It is a home of shalom bayit that can produce a Moses. It is a home where parents are devoted to each other, where Shabbos is Shabbos, and where great difficulties are solved by recourse to God. The historian Josephus records in his Antiquities (Book ii, ch. ix: 3) a beautiful prayer that Amram prayed before Moses was born, asking God to protect the Jewish people, and the appearance of God in a dream to Amram, telling him that his son, soon to be born, will be the one who will deliver Israel from its foes, and "his memory shall be famous while the world lasts." When parents are devoted to each other, and remember God, their child has the chance to be like Moses, the memory of whom lasts forever.

The third quality is one demonstrated by Amram in a remarkable and striking story recorded by our Sages (Mekhilta DeRashbi, 2:19a). Remember that Pharaoh had ordained that every Jewish boy be drowned in the Nile. It was clearly the plan of Egypt to execute genocide against Israel and destroy them forever. And the plan was put into effect, and Jewish babies were being killed by the thousands. Imagine the bitterness of Jewish parents, especially mothers, who had labored and travailed and then had their babes torn out of their embracing arms to be cast into the river before their very eyes. What unimaginable anguish they must have experienced as year after year their children were taken from them and killed! When Amram, who, as previously stated, was a leader of the Israelites, saw what was occurring, he divorced his wife, and counseled all Jews to do the same, crying out "lama anu meyagim et atzmeinu lehinam," "why do we labor for naught?" What use is there in bearing children if they are to be killed? Why go on with life when no life is promised to us? Let us put an end to this tragic farce! Let us not produce targets for their trigger-practice. Let us not give the Egyptians the opportunity to impose their sadism upon our tots. Let every Jewish man leave his wife, and let no more Jewish children be born. Let us not fight against fate.

And so, for a long while, according to tradition, Amram separated from Yocheved, and the great majority of all Israelites did the

same. But then his daughter, Miriam, urged him to reconsider. She told him this was no solution, since by doing this he was merely saving the Egyptian hordes the task of making Israel extinct. She spoke to him of hope and courage and determination and sacrifice. And Amram listened to his daughter. He began to understand that it is truly possible that some day the dark and heavy clouds will part to allow a ray of sunshine to brighten their lives. He began to foresee the possibility that God would not remain silent, that help would yet come, and that despair would not solve anything. And so he instructed his people to return to their wives and their homes and fling a challenge to the teeth of Fate. And how beautifully do the Sages describe the remarriage of Amram and Yocheved: Amram built an “apiryon” or *huppa* for her, and their children, Aaron and Miriam, danced before them. The very angels of heaven sang for them with the words “eim habanim semeiha halleluya,” “the mother of children is happy, praise the Lord” (Psalms 113:9). And out of that remarriage was born Moses, the very person who would force the black clouds apart and bring the rays of freedom into the empty lives of his downtrodden people. “Vehiskima da’ato leda’at haMakom,” say our Rabbis – Amram’s decision was in accordance with God’s will.

That is what parents must be if their children are to be Moseses. They must have faith even when in the hard grip of doom and gloom. They must show courage even when it seems utterly ridiculous to do so. They must be able to challenge destiny and dare fate and stand firm in the face of overwhelming odds and almost certain defeat. That trust in the future, in God’s justice, is what gives parents the right to have a child like Moses.

Amram and Yocheved were able to foresee ultimate help. Moses was then the man to prophesize *geula* even during the thick of *galut*. Amram and Yocheved looked into the waters of the Nile and saw that God would save the indestructible babies cast therein. Moses was able to see a “seneh bo’er ba’esh,” the burning bush (Exodus 3:2), in the desert, the bush which burns but is never destroyed.

That is a mark of greatness – the ability to hope and hold out for the sun to shine again. Only that can awaken a slumbering, moribund, coma-bound people. Let no one ever question where the next generation of Jews will come from. They will come from big cities and small towns, wherever there is a Jewish school and wherever there are parents who have in them a touch of Amram and Yocheved, parents of Moses.

If there be amongst us a man and woman who can continue his and her own development and growth as true and great Jews and Jewesses, and who can live, husband with wife, so that the Jewish verities and virtues and *tzina* and *shalom bayit* are truly implanted in their home

– a home of domestic happiness and Jewishness, and maximal Jewish education – and if these people can doggedly maintain the firm faith that greater times are yet to come for our people and that we must build and plan and labor for those great times when Jews will be great and learned and proud and unashamed and full-blooded Jews, then such parents deserve Moseses. It is they who will give birth to millions at one time, to men and women who will rise to the leadership of Israel and serve their people and their God in truth and faith.

It was not so long ago that every Jewish mother harbored the secret wish that her child become the *Mashiach*, the savior of Israel. And no, it was not naïve or primitive. It was Jewish through and through. The wife of R. Maimon in Spain wanted – and got – a Maimonides for a child. The mother of the Vilna Gaon prayed for one like him, and deserved him, and therefore bore him. Who would not have laughed at the mothers of the leaders of modern Israel had they heard them silently praying that their children be leaders of their people?

It is this that can wake up a people when “nitnannem hatzibur,” when they begin to succumb to another sleep. It is this which can shake them out of the lethargy and drowsiness which come from despair. Yes, a woman can give birth to 600,000. A parent can develop a child who will reflect the worth and value and strength of an entire people. It can be done. But it requires these three: self-development of the parents, a good Jewish home of happiness and peace and Torah, and the faith and courage and strength to hope and hold out for better and greater eras to come.

There is nothing more sensational than the knowledge that it is within the power of each and every one of us to raise a Moses.

Excerpted from Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s Derashot Ledorot: A Commentary for the Ages – Exodus, co-published by OU Press, Maggid Books, and YU Press; edited by Stuart W. Halpern

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Hakaras HaTov and B’ni Bechori Yisrael

I will share a brilliant insight on this week’s parsha from the Tolner Rebbe (Rabbi Yitzchok Menachem Weinberg of Jerusalem).

The pasuk says in Parshas Shemos “...See all the wonders that I have placed in your hand, and you shall do them before Pharaoh and I will harden his heart and he will not send away the nation. And you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says Hashem, My son, My firstborn, Israel.’” (Shemos 4:21-22). Rashi writes on the words “My son, My firstborn, Israel” as follows: “This is an expression of greatness (lashon gedula).” In other words, the Hebrew word *Bechor* here does not necessarily mean firstborn, it connotes greatness.

After Rashi gives the “simple interpretation” (pshuto), he then cites the Medrashic

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interpretation, which indeed takes the word *Bechor* in its literal sense: “Here the Almighty certified the sale of the birthright by Eisav to Yaakov.” It is as if the Holy One places His signature on the document of sale that Eisav wrote up, selling his rights of being the firstborn to his younger brother.

Three questions may be asked here:

All the way back in Parshas Bereshis, Rashi says “There are many Medrashim, but I have come only to provide the “P’shuto shel Mikra” (the simple interpretation of Scripture). This pasuk that we just quoted is actually just one of the dozens and dozens of Medrashim that Rashi brings. When Rashi brings a Medrash, it is because something is bothering Rashi and the “pshat” just does not adequately solve the issue. Therefore, Rashi marshals a Medrash to help elaborate a deeper interpretation of the pasuk. The question we need to pose here is what is the problem with this pasuk? What was lacking in the simple interpretation, which prompted Rashi to bring a Medrash for deeper understanding?

The transfer of the Birthright between Eisav and Yaakov was an event which occurred approximately 250 years earlier. Why does Hashem suddenly certify this sale now?

This is a generic question. The Halacha is that a firstborn is entitled to a “double portion” of his father’s estate—double what any of his brothers receive. Why did the Torah grant the firstborn a double portion? We just finished learning the tragic story of Yosef and his brothers. It all started with Yaakov showing favoritism to Yosef and giving him something that he did not give to his other sons. The Talmud teaches (Shabbos 10b) that a father should NOT show favoritism to one brother over another. And yet here the Torah says that a firstborn receives a double portion! Why did the Torah do that?

Those are the three questions: Why was it necessary to bring the Medrash? Why now? And in general, why does a *Bechor* get “pi shnayim”?

To answer these questions, the Tolner Rebbe postulates three principles:

Principle #1: There are few things that are more disgusting to Hashem than a person who is a *kafui tov* (ingrate). The Medrash of Rav Eliezer states “There is nothing as difficult to handle for the Holy One Blessed Be He as someone who ignores a favor done for him.”

Principle #2: The Meshech Chochma in this week’s parsha explains that a *Bechor* receives a double portion because a father owes *hakaras hatov* (gratitude) to his firstborn son for having made him into a father. Fatherhood is an entirely different chapter of a person’s life, which enhances the worth and essence of an individual. The firstborn is the one who makes his father into a father.

This Meshech Chochma basically answers question #3 above, explaining why the Bechor receives the double portion, and explaining why this is not a violation of a father showing favoritism among children. The Bechor deserves the double portion as a token of the gratitude the father has to him for making him into a father!

Once we understand this connection between Bechora (the status of being a firstborn) and hakaras hatov (the debt of gratitude a person has for someone who did him a favor), we introduce...

Principle #3: The pasuk says, “A scoffer (naval) says in his heart, ‘There is no G-d’” (Tehillim 14:1 & Tehillim 53:2). Rashi, in his commentary on Tehillim, says this pasuk refers (prophetically) to either Nebuchadnezzar or Titus. However, the Medrash says the naval referenced in the pasuk is referring to Eisav. The Medrash commentaries explain that the reason that Eisav is considered such a naval is because he is the epitome of a kafui tov. The Medrash states that when Yaakov received the Bechora, Eisav hated him. He said to himself, “I just can’t wait until my father will die, and then I will kill Yaakov.” But he was not satisfied with just waiting. He planned to speed up the process by hastening his father’s death. But rather than do this dastardly act himself, he went to Yishmael and asked him to kill his (paternal) brother, Yitzchak. “You kill your brother Yitzchak and I will kill my brother Yaakov, and then we will receive the whole inheritance between the two of us!” However, the Medrash continues, part of Eisav’s diabolical plan was that after Yishmael killed Yitzchak and Eisav killed Yaakov, Eisav intended to kill Yishmael and take the whole inheritance for himself! This, the Medrash says, is the epitome of a naval.

Thus, the example par excellence of a person who is a kafui tov is Eisav. Now, who else in Chumash is a kafui tov? It is Pharaoh! Why is he a kafui tov? Look what the Jewish people did for Egypt, to the extent that the Egyptians themselves said to Pharaoh, “How can you do this? The Jews saved us. The Jews kept us alive!” When Yaakov Avinu came down to Mitzrayim, the famine ended. So Pharaoh is also a kafui tov.

If that is the case, it all comes together. Eisav is a kafui tov. The whole reason for the Bechora is because people need to show gratitude (to be makir tov). A person who is not makir tov has no connection to the Bechora. Therefore, Hashem says “I agree. I sign onto the sale of the Birthright from Eisav to Yaakov because Bechora is all about appreciating the concept of hakaras hatov.” Eisav, who is ready to kill his brother, his father, and his father-in-law (Eisav married Yisrael’s daughter) has no connection whatsoever to hakaras hatov and consequently, not to the Bechora either!

Therefore, it is now that Hashem tells Moshe “You tell Pharaoh that I can’t stand him either because Yisrael is my first born! I certify the transfer of the Bechora away from someone who is a kafui tov. Just as Eisav was not a makir tov, you, Pharaoh, are also a kafui tov!”

This explains what was bothering Rashi, as well. Listen carefully to the two Pesukim. “... Go ahead and do these signs I have given you in front of Pharaoh. I will harden his heart and he will not send out the nation. And you shall say to Pharaoh, thus said Hashem, My son, My firstborn, Israel.” (Shemos 4:21-22). Note that once Hashem told Moshe that the signs were to be done “in front of Pharaoh” it was not necessary to mention the monarch’s name, but rather it sufficed to use the pronouns “his heart” and “he will not send.” It is clear that the pronouns refer to Pharaoh. Likewise, in Pasuk 22, there was no reason to mention Pharaoh by name. The pasuk could have just as well said “And you shall say to him...”. Why was it necessary to say “And you shall say to Pharaoh”?

That is what was bothering Rashi. Why does the pasuk need to re-mention Pharaoh’s name? But now Rashi has an answer. The reason is that Pharaoh is a kafui tov. The Ari z”l points out that the letters of the word Pharaoh (Pay Reish Ayin Hay) also spell haoref (Hay Ayin Reish Pay), meaning the back of the neck, which represents someone turning their back on someone. The reason the Torah emphasizes Pharaoh in this pasuk is that Pharaoh represents haoref – the person who is characterized by a demonstration of ingratitude towards someone who has done him a favor symbolized by showing him the back of his neck, turning his back upon him. Pharaoh turned his back on Klal Yisrael, the nation of Yosef, who saved Egypt from destruction.

Rashi cites the Medrash to explain why the Torah needs to say “Vayomer el Pharaoh” rather than “Vayomer E’lav,” to emphasize that the Egyptian monarch is haoref – characterized by his ingratitude which is symbolized by the back of his neck. Because of Hashem’s intolerance for those who are ungrateful, he signed on the Bechora of Yaakov, eliminating Eisav from that role because Eisav too was a kafui tov. Pharaoh is being told that he too will receive his punishment now, because like Eisav, he is a kafui tov.

Dvar Torah

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

Why is this book different from all other books? This shabbat we’ll be commencing the reading of the book of Shemot, which some people call the book of Exodus. Interestingly, the Rambam calls the book Sefer HaGeula, the Book of Redemption, for obvious reasons.

Second - But I find most fascinating the fact that the Bal Halachot Gedolot, (the BH’G), calls Shemot by the name ‘Chumash Sheini’, the second of the chumashim.

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We know that there are ‘chamisha chumshei Torah,’ five chumashim – the five books of the Torah. But why doesn’t the BH’G call Bereishit ‘Chumash Rishon’ – the first chumash? Why doesn’t he call Bamidbar, ‘Chumash Revi’I’, the fourth of the chumashim? Why is it only Shemot which is called the second?

Incomplete - The Netziv, in his masterful work HaAmek Davar, gives a beautiful explanation. The Netziv says as follows. The BH’G wants us to know that Sefer Bereishit is incomplete without Sefer Shemot. Sefer Shemot is the continuation of Bereishit, and the reason is because Bereishit is all about the creation and the first generations on earth, while Shemot is about the prelude to the giving of the Torah, the actual giving of it, and the housing of the Torah in the Tabernacle. The message for us therefore is that that the creation was incomplete without the existence of the Torah

So here, we are reminded yet again about the centrality of Torah in our lives. Without Torah, we are nothing. That’s both at an individual level and also as far as our nation is concerned. In addition, we have a responsibility in all of our deeds and in our teachings to always reflect the values of Torah and ultimately, in this way, we will enhance our environment because we also recognise that the entire world is incomplete without Torah values.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Moshe’s Soul Work

Rabbi Zecharia and Nava Deutsch

In our parsha we are introduced to Moshe, who will be the leading figure from this point onwards, until Vezot HaBracha, the very last portion of the Torah.

Throughout the four Books of the Torah in which Moshe takes center stage, we are witness to the process Moshe undergoes: from being “the child who was good” to becoming “the man of God”.

Let us look into our parsha in the hope of understanding the true nature of the man called Moshe and why he was chosen to be the savior of Israel.

Moshe the young man: “And when Moses was grown up, he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens” (Shemot 2:11). Rashi brings the Midrash and explains that “he set his eyes and hearts on them in their pain.” Moshe was certainly not ignorant of the circumstances of the Children of Israel, and was aware of their suffering. But he wanted more than just awareness. He wanted to feel their pain in his own heart.

Years pass and we are introduced to Moshe the father. Moshe calls his firstborn son Gershom – “for I have been a stranger [ger] in a strange land.” Moshe had fled from Egypt, but cannot help but think of his afflicted brethren who are

still there. By calling his son Gershom, Moshe expresses his sorrow and the deep bond he still cherishes with his own people. Although the Israelites in Egypt are the strangers, gerim, in a land not theirs, it is Moshe who feels that he is the real ger, the ultimate stranger, being far away from his brethren in Egypt. By calling his son Gershom, Moshe ascertains that he will never forget his brethren in Egypt.

Then we meet Moshe the shepherd. Moshe notices a burning bush which does not seem to be consumed. Awed by the sight, he draws near to see why the bush has remained untouched. God calls out to Moshe from the burning bush and identifies Himself as the God of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov. And immediately "Moshe hid his face for he was afraid to look upon the Lord." Our Sages teach us in the tractate of Brachot that because Moshe was "afraid to look", he merited "to look upon the similitude of God." What does this mean?

We once heard a beautiful commentary from Rabbi Nachum Eliezer Rabinovitch, of blessed memory. Rabbi Rabinovitch explains that God wanted to teach Moshe the hidden qualities of Midat HaDin, the Attribute of Justice, found in the Divine name Elokim. God wanted Moshe to comprehend the real reason for the suffering of the People of Israel, but Moshe refuses. What was Moshe afraid of?

Moshe was afraid that the minute he understood the purpose of the suffering, he would lose his compassion. When a person has a purpose, or a goal to which he aspires, he is able to gird himself with strength and endure any pain and hardship that might come his way (much like a necessary medical procedure one has to endure).

It is this precise attitude that Moshe did not wish to adopt. Moshe wanted to remain as ignorant as his suffering brethren, who endured their anguish without the knowledge that it was serving a purpose. Moshe wanted to hold onto his compassionate and sensitive heart. He did not wish to rationalize the Israelites' pain and look upon it as would an outsider. Rather, he wanted to feel their pain together with them. Moshe's reward was "to look upon the similitude of God" – i.e., to have an understanding of Midat Harachamim, the Attribute of Mercy.

Moshe merited a profound understanding of the inherent goodness which exists in every person. Because he was not willing to look upon people through the prism of Midat HaDin, he was given the ability to look upon every individual through the Attribute of Mercy; the quality which would gain him insight into the human heart and allow him to see the bountiful mercy present in this world.

The three scenes in which Moshe appears seem to have one common denominator: empathy. In the first scene, at the outset of Moshe's adult life, he goes out to his brethren

with the aim of seeing them. Moshe is proactive and goes out to the people to observe them from up close. He wants to feel his fellow brethren, step into their shoes, as it were.

In the second scene, Moshe gives his son a name that expresses his empathy for the People of Israel, and in so doing, perpetuates this emotion.

The third time we encounter Moshe in our portion, we see that Moshe is given the opportunity to learn the secret of God's leadership in this world, but he refuses so as not to undermine the compassion he feels for the People of Israel.

All of these actions and reactions teach us how important it is for leaders, and any person for that matter, to be sensitive to others. Moreover, we also learn that it is no less important to exert efforts in order to upkeep this feeling. Some people have a natural propensity for this particular emotional quality, while others do not. We must think of creative ways to incorporate this good trait into our character.

During the course of our emissary work here on the local campus, we have been fortunate to meet all kinds of people, each with his or her unique story and background. Students turn to us and ask for our assistance in numerous matters. Sometimes a student may find it difficult to combine academic studies with religious duties; in other instances, a student may struggle to fit in socially. And sometimes, all a person really wants is an attentive ear, someone trustworthy to whom he can disclose all that lies heavy on his heart.

As foreigners, who come from an altogether different culture, our viewpoint does not always allow us to see what the person in front of us is really going through. Moshe teaches us how important it is to be proactive, and to set one's eyes and one's heart upon the other in order to tune into what the other person is experiencing. It means putting one's own sense of self aside, and stepping into the shoes of the other, listening to the story of the other in an attempt to experience reality as s/he is experiencing it.

A little before our firstborn son turned three, we started telling him the story of Moshe in the basket. He loved the story and asked us to tell it to him each night before going to bed. One day, we role-played the story. Our son was Moshe, and we, his parents, role-played the parts of Yocheved and the daughter of Pharaoh. We chose the scene when Moshe is weaned, and the time has come to say goodbye to Yocheved, and go to the home of the daughter of Pharaoh. Before they say farewell, Yocheved asks Moshe not to forget his family, his past, his self. She sings the verses of Shema Yisrael and Ha'mal'ach ha'go'el oti – "The angel who protects me...". At this point in our role-play game, my son, feeling the pain

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of the pending separation, shed a tear. "And behold, there was a boy who was crying."

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg

The Qualities of a Leader

In Parshas Shemos (3:10), Hashem asks Moshe Rabbeinu to become the leader of Klal Yisrael. What are some of the character traits that made Moshe worthy of this position? The Torah describes Moshe's first encounter with the Jewish people after leaving the palace. "Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and he saw their burdens - vayar b'sivlosam" (2:11). Rashi explains that the word b'sivlosam (especially the beis) implies that Moshe didn't just see their oppression in a detached, dispassionate way. Rather, he entered their world. He empathized with them. He focused his attention and his heart to commiserate with their plight. He shared their burden.

But what's even more noteworthy than Moshe's emotional reaction to what he saw is the very fact that he took an interest in the first place. After all, Moshe was living a life of luxury in the palace of Paroh. He did not suffer the same fate as his brothers. And yet, he took it upon himself to share the pain of his fellow Jews. That is the first mark of a leader - to be sensitive to the challenges of his people.

The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 2, 2) relates that once when Moshe was caring for Yisro's sheep, one of the sheep ran away, and Moshe followed it until it came to a spring and started drinking, whereupon Moshe said to the sheep, "I didn't realize you were thirsty; you must be tired." And he carried the sheep on his shoulders back to the flock. Hashem told Moshe that since he showed compassion for the sheep, he is worthy of leading the Jewish people. What distinguished Moshe was not just the fact that he carried the sheep back, but that he realized that the sheep was tired. He evaluated the situation and understood what the sheep needed. It was this ability to sense what others need that made Moshe worthy of leadership.

But a leader has to do more than just see a need. He must have the strength and the courage to take action. When Moshe sees an Egyptian hitting a Jew, Moshe turns this way and that "and he saw there was no man," so he killed the Egyptian (2:12). How could it be that there was no one else there? The Ksav V'hakabalah explains that there were other Jews around, but no one else had the courage to protest the injustice they were seeing. No one was prepared to step up and try to intervene. So Moshe got involved. A leader is someone who doesn't just see a need, but is ready to take on responsibility. He is prepared to act no matter what the consequences.

Later, after running away from Paroh, Moshe comes to Midian, and he finds that shepherds are mistreating the daughters of Yisro. Once

again, Moshe takes initiative and saves the daughters of Yisro from the shepherds (2:17). Moshe would have preferred to mind his own business. What fugitive gets involved in a dispute that has nothing to do with him? But Moshe was the kind of person who could not sit back when he saw injustice being perpetrated. He just had to take responsibility.

It is not surprising that when Hashem tells Moshe after forty years in the desert that it is time to appoint his successor, Moshe asks that the new leader be one "who shall go out before them" (Pinchas 27:17). Rashi explains that Moshe meant to say that the chosen leader should be someone who will lead the Jewish people in battle, just like he and later David did, as opposed to the non-Jewish kings who sit back in their palaces and send their troops into battle from afar. A good leader is one who is prepared to roll up his sleeves and lead by example. He is ready to take action and stand up for his principles when that is necessary.

A third quality that Moshe demonstrated that made him worthy of leadership was humility. When Hashem first asks Moshe to take the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim, Moshe resists. He says, "Who am I that I should go to Paroh and that I should take the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim" (3:11). Hashem responds, "For I shall be with you, and this is the sign that I have sent you, when you take the people out of Mitzrayim, you will serve G-d on this mountain (Har Sinai)" (3:12).

The Meshech Chochmah suggests that Hashem was telling Moshe that his humility was precisely the quality that made him worthy of leading the Jewish people. Hashem was saying that he rests His Shechina only on the humble (Nedarim 38a), and that is why Moshe who was the most humble of men (Beha'aloscha 12, 3) was the perfect choice to lead the Jewish people out of Mitzrayim and to serve as Hashem's emissary to present the Torah to the Jewish people on Har Sinai, the smallest of the mountains (see Megillah 29a). Rather than being a disadvantage, Moshe's humility was exactly the quality that made him worthy of leadership.

All too often, leaders and managers use their positions of authority to take advantage of those below them. They abuse their power and they tyrannize those they are charged to lead. They care only about themselves. True leadership is not about self-promotion. It is about identifying the needs of the enterprise and one's subordinates, taking initiative to fulfill the mission at hand, while serving as an example of self-sacrifice and humility. Moshe Rabbeinu had all these qualities. He serves as an enduring model of the ultimate leader.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah by Rabbi Label Lam

A Holy Place – And He said, "Do not draw near here. Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is

holy soil." (Shemos 3:5) is holy soil: The place – Rashi

Why is Moshe instructed to take off his shoes? How is this place where the Torah is to be given already holy? Nothing has happened there yet? What is the business of removing shoes?

More than 30 years ago, while running a program for prisoners, I brought a colleague of mine who travels widely as a guest speaker. Because the prisoners crave to know what's going on "out there" and they live vicariously through the adventures of others, they nudged the Rabbi with desperation to tell them where he had been recently. He answered glibly, "I was just in the world's largest prison and there I confronted the most- fierce warden of them all!" Some started to guess which place and which person he was referring to.

After they got quiet, he told them, "The largest prison in the world is the whole world!" I felt an awkward silence in the room and I glanced up sideways signaling that he ought not to continue peddling these soft parables or this was going to be a long night or a short night. As I expected, they chorused "All of us would love to go to that prison! Let us go out there!" The second answer shed light on the first and his words became poignantly clear. "Who's that fierce warden? Myself!" He explained "This guard keeps you from going a few feet to your left and right! This one stops you from getting beyond that point! I have my limitations too. If I travel north, I cannot go south. Of course, my limitations are far more expansive than yours on a horizontal plane, but who keeps us from going up, from climbing vertically, transcending the confines of this place and reaching the fullness of our real potential, even here in prison! Nobody stops us but ourselves!"

I know it was 30 years ago, because my wife gave birth a week later, on Shabbos Tisha B'Av to a baby boy who turned 30 this past Tisha B'Av. Thirty seconds into the world, I held him for the first time. Maybe it was the footprint reminding me of the finger printing when entering prison but the first unrehearsed words that escaped my mouth at that time were, "Welcome to the prison!"

My wife looked up at me with bewilderment. I owed her an explanation but I needed to explain it to myself first. It dawned on me that here, this lofty soul, a breath from The Almighty Himself, bigger and brighter than anything in this universe, aware of the whole Torah on some sublime level has just been crushed into this tiny body, sans teeth and sans vocabulary. He thinks he wants soda and pizza but deep-deep down he wants much-much more. We pray for the wisdom of the warden.

After that visit to the prison, we launched a new orientation program for anyone entering the prison system. We would ask him, "Where do you live?" The fellow would answer, "Green Haven!" The question would persist, "Where do you live?" The answer would expand to "New York". Again, the question and then, "America" and next the "world"! Very nice but where are you??? The answer we

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repeated till it was real: "We are in front of HASHEM!" If that's your mind-set then you are not in prison! Sure, your feet are here in this shoe but that's not where you need to be a whole day! The Baal Shem Tov said, "Wherever a person's thoughts are, that is where he is entirely!"

The Talmud has a debate about how Adam – Man was created. From which lot of dust did HASHEM shape that first man? One opinion is that he was made entirely from dust at the location of the Holy of Holies while the other approach is that only his head was made from that earth and the rest was collected from all over the world.

This creates two types of human movements, two types of people. Some feel a compelling need to travel the world horizontally while others come to a realization that their ambition is to climb vertically, endlessly, from where they are, as depicted in the imagery of Yaakov Avinu's ladder.

On a practical level, removing one's shoes is a demonstration of a commitment to being where you're at. On a deeper level, a "NAAL" – literally a shoe means a lock as well. Stepping out of the prison of this body, this tiny lock that clothes and holds this lowest part of our being opens one up to the possibility of living in front of HASHEM. That transforms this place, wherever we are so aware into a holy place.

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Being Able to See What Others Don't

What is greatness? What makes a person into someone who leads an inspired, great and significant life?

We see this clearly from the beginning of the leadership career of our greatest leader, Moshe Rabbeinu, in the first thing he did.

It says, "Vayigdal Moshe", "and Moshe became great". But we read in the verse before that he became great, so why is it repeated? What did Moshe do that was so great?

The verse continues to say that he "went out to his brethren", he goes beyond himself, outside of his self-centered world. Then, three times it says "Vayar", "he saw".

Average people look, they see, but they don't truly see what is going on, don't hear the cries of others, they don't see the imperfections and injustices of society and are inspired to do something about it. We look and we don't see.

Moshe Rabbeinu sees. He sees beyond himself, he is empathetic to the trials and tribulations of others and wants to do something about it – and does.

When we are able to go beyond ourselves, to detect those imperfections and injustices, and to inspire ourselves to act and do something about it, that is greatness.

May we all, in our spheres of influence, see and be empathetic to the suffering and the needs of others, and to get up and do something about it; to ensure we are doing everything we can to heal a fractured world.

Weekly Parsha SHEMOT

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

It should be obvious to all that Moshe is a very unlikely choice to head the Jewish people, to redeem them from Egyptian bondage, and to bring the Torah down from Heaven to the Jewish people and eventually to all of humankind. It is also clear that Moshe would not be the likely one to guide them through the vicissitudes of war, thirst and forty years sojourn in the desert of Sinai.

Rambam writes that Moshe was of short temper. The Torah records for us that he was raised in the palace of the Egyptian Pharaoh. He kills an Egyptian and covers up his deed. He is a shepherd for a pagan priest of Midyan and marries one of his daughters. He is separated from his people for sixty years before returning to them and proclaiming himself as their leader. Not really too impressive a resume for the greatest of all humans and of the Jewish people! But there it is for all to see and study. So, what is the message that the Torah is sending to us with this narrative?

Who needs to know of his previous life before becoming the Moshe we revere? After all, the Torah does not explicitly tell us about the youth experiences of Noach, Avraham and other great men of Israel and the world. So, why all the detail – much of it not too pleasant – about the early life of Moshe? The question almost begs itself of any student of Torah. The Torah is always concise and chary of words, so this concentration of facts and stories about Moshe's early life is somewhat puzzling.

What is clear from biblical narrative and Jewish and world history generally is that Heaven does not play by our rules nor does it conduct itself by our preconceived norms and notions. We never would have chosen David as our king, Amos as our prophet or Esther as our savior from destruction. Jewish history in a great measure has been formed by unlikely heroes, unexpected champions and surprising personalities.

It is almost as if Heaven wishes to mock our pretensions and upset our conventional wisdom. Oftentimes it is our stubborn nature, our haughtiness to think that we are always privy to God's plans and methods that has led us to stray far from truth and reality. The greatness of the generation that left Egypt was that it not only believed in the God of Israel but believed in His servant Moshe as well. Throughout his career as leader of Israel, according to Midrash, the rebels would always hold Moshe's past against him. They could not come to terms with Moshe as being their leader for he did not fit the paradigm that they had constructed for themselves. Eventually this disbelief in Moshe translated itself into a disbelief in God as well and doomed that generation to perish in the desert of Sinai. God's plans, actions and choices, so to speak, are inscrutable. The prophet taught us that God stated: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts and My ways are not your ways." Moshe's life story is a striking example of this truism.

Shabbat shalom

Rabbi Berel Wein

The Challenge of Jewish Leadership

SHEMOT

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

I used to say, only half in jest, that the proof that Moses was the greatest of the prophets was that when God asked him to lead the Jewish people, he refused four times: Who am I to lead? They will not believe in me. I am not a man of words. Please send someone else.

It is as if Moses knew with uncanny precision what he would be letting himself in for. Somehow he sensed in advance that it may be hard to be a Jew, but to be a leader of Jews is almost impossible.

How did Moses know this? The answer lies many years back in his youth. It was then when, having grown up, he went out to see his people for the first time. He saw them enslaved, being forced into heavy labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He intervened and saved his life. The next day he saw two Hebrews fighting, and again

he intervened. This time the man he stopped said to him, "Who appointed you as our leader and judge?"

Note that Moses had not yet even thought of being a leader and already his leadership was being challenged. And these are the first recorded words spoken to Moses by a fellow Jew. That was his reward for saving the life of an Israeliite the day before.

And though God persuaded Moses, or ordered him, to lead, it never ceased to be difficult, and often demoralising. In Devarim, he recalls the time when he said: "How can I myself bear Your problems, Your burdens and Your disputes all by myself" (Deut. 1:12). And in Beha'alotecha, he suffers what can only be called a breakdown:

He asked the Lord, "Why have You brought this trouble on Your servant? What have I done to displease You that You put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth? Why do You tell me to carry them in my arms, as a nurse carries an infant, to the land You promised on oath to their ancestors? . . . I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You are going to treat me, please go ahead and kill me—if I have found favour in Your eyes—and do not let me face my own ruin." Num. 11:11-15

And this was said, don't forget, by the greatest Jewish leader of all time. Why are Jews almost impossible to lead?

The answer was given by the greatest rebel against Moses' leadership, Korach. Listen carefully to what he and his associates say:

They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord assembly?"

Num. 16:3

Korach's motives were wrong. He spoke like a democrat but what he wanted was to be an autocrat. He wanted to be a leader himself. But there is a hint in his words of what is at stake.

Jews are a nation of strong individuals. "The whole community is holy, every one of them." They always were. They still are. That is their strength and their weakness. There were times when they found it difficult to serve God. But they certainly would not serve anyone less. They were the "stiff-necked" people, and people with stiff necks find it hard to bow down.

The Prophets would not bow down to Kings. Mordechai would not bow down to Haman. The Maccabees would not bow down to the Greeks. Their successors would not bow down to the Romans. Jews are fiercely individualistic. At times this makes them unconquerable. It also makes them almost ungovernable, almost impossible to lead.

That is what Moses discovered in his youth when, trying to help his people, their first response was to say, "Who appointed you as our leader and judge?" That is why he was so hesitant to take on the challenge of leadership, and why he refused four times.

There has been much debate in British and American Jewry recently[1] about whether there should be an agreed collective stance of unconditional support for the state and government of Israel, or whether our public position should reflect the deep differences that exist among Jews today, within Israel or outside.

My view is that Israel needs our support at this critical time. But the debate that has taken place is superfluous. Jews are a nation of strong individuals who, with rare historic exceptions, never agreed about anything. That makes them unleadable; it also makes them unconquerable. The good news and the bad go hand in hand. And if, as we believe, God loved and still loves this people despite all its faults, may we do less?

[1] It should be noted for context that this essay was written by Rabbi Sacks in November 2010, amidst a widespread communal debate regarding Israel.

Parshat Shemot: From Genesis to Exodus – From Joseph the “Insider” to Moses the “Outsider”

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“Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, and God of our fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob...” [The Opening Blessing of the “Amida”]

The opening of the Amida prayer stops with Jacob’s name. But why should the patriarchal line be limited to three – why not four patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph? After all, Joseph’s role in the Genesis narrative is unquestionably central to the entire book of Genesis. A case could be made for showing that he shares a similar fate to those of all three patriarchs. Like Abraham, he lives among idolaters and must maintain his faith and traditions within a hostile environment. Like Isaac, he suffers a personal akedah, about to be slain not by his father but by his brothers, saved not by a ram but by Midianite traders. And like Jacob, who set the foundation for the twelve tribes of Israel, Joseph provided Jacob’s descendants with life and sustenance as the Grand Vizier of Egypt. Moreover, in resisting the seductive perfumes of his master Potiphar’s wife, Joseph merits the unique accolade haTzadik (literally, ‘the righteous one’) appended to his name. As a result, he has come to represent for all of his descendants the mastery of the spiritual over the physical. If indeed Joseph is known to us forever as Joseph the Tzadik, and being that he is the son of Jacob, why is he not considered the fourth patriarch? After all, there are four parallel patriarchs!

To understand why, we must compare and contrast him not with the patriarchs who precede him, but with the personality who, from the moment of his appearance in the book of Exodus, stands at center stage for the rest of the Torah and all of subsequent Jewish religious history: Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our Teacher.

The idea of linking Moses and Joseph comes from the Midrash. Moses, the giant liberator of Israel, never enters the Land of Israel himself, and is even buried on Mount Nevo at the outskirts of the Promised Land – exactly where, nobody knows. Joseph, on the other hand, is buried in the heartland of Samaria – Shechem – which lives as a national shrine to this very day. Why does Joseph merit such preferred treatment?

The midrashic explanation is based on two verses that highlight contrasting aspects of their respective biographies. When Joseph was imprisoned and he spoke to the wine steward for the sake of interpreting his dream, he asked to be remembered to Pharaoh: “For indeed I was stolen away from out of the land of the Hebrews” (Gen. 40:15). Joseph does not hesitate to reveal his Jewish background.

Moses, on the other hand, after having rescued the Midianite shepherdesses, hears the women reporting to their father how “...an Egyptian delivered us out of the hand of the shepherds, and drew water for us, and watered the flock” (Ex. 2:19). He does not correct them, saying “I am not an Egyptian but a Hebrew!” This silence, explains the Midrash, is why not even his bones may be brought back to the Land of Israel (See Midrash Devarim Raba, 2:8).

In justifying the burial of Joseph’s bones in Israel, testifying to his unflinching recognition of his roots, the Midrash may be adding a notch of pride to Joseph’s belt. But in truth, I believe that our sages are merely attempting to temper the indisputable fact that Moses is a far more “Jewish Jew” than Joseph in the most profound sense of the term.

In many ways, Joseph and Moses are contrasting personalities, mirror images of each other, with Moses rectifying the problematic steps taken by Joseph. Joseph was born in Israel, but became professionally successful in Egypt; Moses was born in Egypt, but established his place in history by taking the Jews on their way to Israel. Joseph was the insider who chose to move outside (he dreamt of Egyptian agriculture, as well as the cosmic universe). Moses was the outsider (Prince of Egypt), who insisted on coming inside (by slaying the Egyptian taskmaster). Joseph brought his family to Egypt, Moses took his people out of Egypt. Moses saw Egypt as a foreign country, and names his son Gershom “for he said I have been a stranger in a strange land” (Ex. 2:22). Joseph has at best ambiguous feelings about his early years in Canaan, naming his firstborn in Egypt Manasseh “since God has made

me [allowed me to] forget completely my hardship and my parental home” (Gen. 41:51). Joseph, through his economic policies, enslaves the Egyptian farmers to Pharaoh; Moses frees the Jews from their enslavement to Pharaoh. And Joseph’s dreams are realized, whereas Moses’ dream – the vision of Israel’s redemption in Israel – remained tragically unfulfilled at the end of his life.

The truth is that for the majority of Joseph’s professional life he functions as an Egyptian, the Grand Vizier of Egypt. He may have grown up in the old home of the patriarch Jacob, heir to the traditions of Abraham and Isaac, but from the practical point of view, his time and energies are devoted to putting Exxon, Xerox and MGM on the map. Ultimately his professional activities enable him to preserve his people, the children of Israel; but day to day, hour to hour, he is involved in strengthening and aggrandizing Egypt.

A good case could easily be made in praise of Joseph. He never loses sight of God or morality, despite the blandishments of Egyptian society. And God would even testify that He had a special task for Joseph, personally chosen to save the descendants of Jacob and the world from a relentless famine. Nevertheless, he must pay a price for being Grand Vizier of Egypt: The gold chain around his neck is Egyptian, his garments are Egyptian, his limousine is Egyptian, and even his language is Egyptian. Indeed, when his brothers come to ask for bread, an interpreter’s presence is required for the interviews because his very language of discourse is Egyptian, with his countrymen totally unaware of his knowledge of Hebrew!

The difference between Moses and Joseph takes on its sharpest hue when seen against the shadow of Pharaoh. Joseph’s life work consists of glorifying and exalting Pharaoh, in effect bestowing upon the Egyptian King-God the blessings of a prosperous and powerful kingdom, whose subjects are enslaved to him; Moses flees Pharaoh’s court with a traitorous act against him, ultimately humiliating and degrading him by unleashing the ten plagues.

A shepherd and the son of shepherds, Joseph becomes the first Jewish prince in history, while Moses, a genuine prince of Egypt, begins his mature years as a shepherd on the run, risking his life for his commitment to free the Israelites. Jealousy and destiny force Joseph to live out his life away from his brothers, estranging himself from them. But Moses, despite his foreign, Egyptian background, nevertheless cares for his Hebrew brothers and identifies with them. As the Torah most poignantly records:

“And it happened in those days [after the baby Moses was taken to the home of Pharaoh’s daughter] that Moses grew up and he went out to his brothers and he saw [attempting to alleviate] their suffering.” [Exodus 2:11]

Even though Joseph and Moses both change the world and preserve the Jewish people through the divine will that flows through them, their energies get channeled into different directions: Pharaoh and Egypt on the one hand, the Jewish people and Torah on the other.

This may be the significant factor in explaining why our sages stop short at calling Joseph a patriarch. He may be a tzadik, two of his sons may become the heads of tribes, and he may even deserve burial in Israel; but ultimately a hero who spends so much of his energies on behalf of Egypt cannot be called a patriarch of the Jewish nation.

It is recorded that the first chief rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, was tended to in his final years by an internationally known physician. His last words to the doctor were: “I yearn for the day when Jews who are great will also be great Jews.” It was Moses who was undoubtedly the greatest Jew who ever lived.

Shabbat Shalom

A Rishon Letzion Named Rapaport

By Rabbi Yirmiyahu Kaganoff

Question #1: Fragrances on Motza’ei Yom Tov

May I include fragrances as part of havdalah when Yom Tov ends?

Question #2: Late Asher Yatzar

How long do I have to recite Asher Yatzar?

Question #3: Davening Outdoors

Is it permitted to daven in the courtyard outside a shul?

Question #4: A Rishon Letzion Named Rapaport

What do any of these questions have to do with parshas Shemos?

Foreword:

Rishon Letziyon is an old traditional title for the Sefardi rav of Yerushalayim. How did someone named Rapaport, which is a classic Ashkenazi family name, become Rishon Letziyon?

Introduction:

Parshas Shemos teaches that, for disobeying Pharaoh's murderous commands, the Jewish midwives merited the "building of houses." This is explained by the Midrash, quoted by Rashi, to mean that they were granted batei kehunah and batei malchus. Miriam was rewarded with batei malchus, that the royal house of Dovid Hamelech descended from her, and Yocheved merited batei kehunah -- all kohanim are descended from her. The words batei kehunah mean "houses of kehunah," which is a bit strange: why don't Chazal simply call it beis kehunah, "the house of kehunah?" Although we will not answer this question, it became the source of the title of an important halachic work.

Batei Kehunah

A gadol beYisroel who lived three hundred years ago was descended from kohanim on both his father's and his mother's sides. Based on his lineage, he named his Torah works Batei Kehunah. This gadol, who is hardly known in the Ashkenazi world, carried the name Rav Yitzchak HaKohen Rapaport. He was the chacham bashi -- a title for chief rabbi of a large city -- in the Ottoman Empire, first of Izmir, Turkey, and subsequently became both the chacham bashi and the Rishon Letziyon of Yerushalayim. In numerous places, the Chida refers to the Batei Kehunah as the mofeis hador, or as mofeis doroseinu, "the wonder of our generation." Considering that this was the same era in which lived such luminaries as the Gra, the Pnei Yehoshua, the Sha'agas Aryeh, the Noda Biyehudah, the Maharit Algazi and the Chida himself, this is a rather impressive accolade.

Rav Yitzchak Hakohen Rapaport

Rav Yitzchak Hakohen Rapaport was born in Jerusalem in 5445 (1685) to Rabbi Yehudah Rapaport. Rav Yitzchak's father was born in Lublin, Poland, made aliyah to Eretz Yisrael, and there married the daughter of a family of major Torah scholars, who were kohanim and Sefardim. Thus, although Rav Yitzchak's father had been born in Poland, hence the family name Rapaport, he was raised in a completely Sefardi environment. There was no Ashkenazi community in Eretz Yisrael at the time, and therefore Rav Yitzchak treated himself completely as a Sefardi. This explains how a Rishon Letzion could have such an Ashkenazi last name.

In his youth, Rav Yitzchak studied in the yeshiva of the Pri Chodosh, Rav Chizkiyah Di Silva. In his introduction to Batei Kehunah, Rav Yitzchak explains that he never left the beis medrash for fear that he would miss some of his rebbe's Torah or that of the other great men who studied there. After the Pri Chodosh's premature passing (according to various versions, he was somewhere between the ages of 39 and 46 when he passed away), Rav Yitzchak studied under the new rosh yeshiva, Rav Avraham Yitzchak, the author of the work Zera Avraham, another work well known in Sefardi circles, but that receives reactions of "what is that" among Ashkenazim.

Although Rav Yitzchak Rapaport always viewed himself as a resident of Yerushalayim, he served as the rav of Izmer for forty years, after which he returned to Yerushalayim, and was then appointed chacham bashi of the Holy City and Rishon Letzion. Among the Batei Kehunah's many brilliant students, both from his period in Turkey and in Yerushalayim, we find an entire generation of gedolei Yisroel: the Maharit Algazi, the Chida, the Shaar Hamelech, the Ma'aseh Rokeach and Rav Mordechai Rebbiyo, the rav and rosh yeshivah of Hevron, author of the teshuvos Shemen Hamor.

Since this is a halachic column, I will discuss some of the interesting halachic positions of the Batei Kehunah, most of which we know because they are quoted by the Chida, who perused the private library of the Batei Kehunah after the latter's passing in 5515 (1755). The library included notes written in the margins of his seforim, unpublished

teshuvos and other private writings and manuscripts that the Chida quoted, predominantly in his Birkei Yosef commentary to the Shulchan Aruch, most of which would otherwise have become lost to future generations.

Fragrances on Motza'ei Yom Tov

Our opening question was: "May I include fragrances as part of havdalah when Yom Tov ends?" Let me explain the background to this question. The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 29:28) writes that when Yom Tov falls out midweek, at its end we are not required to recite the berachos on fragrances and on a lamp, unlike what we do every motza'ei Shabbos. The Rambam explains that we recite the beracha on fragrances on motza'ei Shabbos because our souls ache when Shabbos ends, and we provide them with some consolation with the pleasant fragrance. The Magid Mishnah raises the following questions about the Rambam's statement:

(1) Indeed, why is the custom that we not smell fragrances when Yom Tov ends, just as we do when Shabbos ends?

(2) Why does the Rambam write that "we are not required to recite the beracha on fragrances?" Shouldn't he write that we do not recite the beracha on fragrances?

The Magid Mishnah answers that the soul aches only when Shabbos ends, because the sanctity of Shabbos is greater, as evidenced by the fact that we are not permitted to perform any melacha. Since cooking food and similar melachos are permitted on Yom Tov, the soul does not ache when Yom Tov ends.

If this is so, the Magid Mishnah asks, why do we not recite the beracha on fragrances as part of the kiddush/havdalah combination when Yom Tov is on motza'ei Shabbos, since the soul aches that Shabbos has ended? The Magid Mishnah answers that the festive celebration of Yom Tov consoles the aching soul the same way that fragrances would, thus rendering the use of besamim unnecessary. The Magid Mishnah then notes that the Rambam writes, "we are not required to recite the berachos on fragrances" when Yom Tov ends, because one can always take fragrances and recite a beracha before smelling them.

The Yad Aharon questions the wording of the Magid Mishnah that the custom is to not recite the beracha over fragrances as part of havdalah on Yom Tov. Would this not be an interruption in the havdalah, since it is not required?

The Chida (Birkei Yosef 491:3) quotes his rebbe, the Batei Kehunah, who wrote in the margin of his own personal copy of the Rambam that the Magid Mishneh wrote his comments very precisely. There would be no problem were someone to include besamim in his havdalah after Yom Tov. And the reason why the minhag is to forgo the besamim is because the soul does not ache when Yom Tov ends to the same extent that it does when Shabbos ends.

Late Asher Yatzar

At this point, let us analyze the second of our opening questions: How long do I have to recite Asher Yatzar?

The Levush discusses whether someone who does not have a need to relieve himself upon awaking recites Asher Yatzar anyway. He rules that he recites Asher Yatzar, because he undoubtedly relieved himself during the night without reciting Asher Yatzar -- thus, he has an outstanding requirement to recite Asher Yatzar. The Adei Zahav, an early commentary on the Levush by Rav Menachem de Lunzanu, disagrees with the Levush, contending that, even if the Levush's technical assumptions are correct -- that we should assume that most people relieved themselves during the night without reciting Asher Yatzar -- a person should still not recite Asher Yatzar upon awaking, because the time within which Asher Yatzar must be recited has expired by morning. The Adei Zahav rules that Asher Yatzar must be recited no more than six hours after relieving himself, and during the long winter nights, someone presumably has slept longer than that since he last relieved himself.

What is the source for the Adei Zahav's ruling that Asher Yatzar must be recited within six hours? The Mishnah (Berachos 51b) states that you can recite an after blessing until the food that was eaten has been digested. The Gemara (Berachos 53b) discusses how long a time this is,

Rabbi Yochanan ruling that it is until you are hungry again, whereas Reish Lakish seems to hold that it is the time it takes to walk four mil, which most authorities understand to be 72 minutes. (Some hold that it is a bit longer.) The Adei Zahav assumes that, according to Rabbi Yochanan, it takes six hours for someone to be hungry again after eating a full meal. The Adei Zahav explains that the time for Asher Yatzar, which is a rabbinic requirement, cannot be longer than it is for bensching, which is required min haTorah. Therefore, he concludes that the longest time within which someone can recite Asher Yatzar is six hours after relieving himself.

Never too late

The Yad Aharon disagrees with the Adei Zahav, contending that although an after beracha is associated with the food or beverage that was consumed and, therefore, can be recited only as long as one is still satiated from what he ate, Asher Yatzar is a general beracha of thanks to Hashem and never becomes too late to recite. This approach would explain the position of the Levush that someone can recite Asher Yatzar in the morning, notwithstanding that it might be far more than six hours since he relieved himself.

The Chida, after quoting the above literature, states, “The mofeis of our generation, our master and rebbe, wrote in the margin of his personal copy that the Yad Aharon’s understanding is inaccurate. The rishonim explain that berachos after eating are appreciation... Asher Yatzar is a beracha for the salvation and also for the relief of the discomfort” (Birkei Yosef, Orach Chayim 6:3). Later in his comments, the Chida explains that the Batei Kehunah held that Asher Yatzar has an expiration time, although he never shared with us how long he holds that would be. There are other reasons to support the Levush’s position that someone should recite Asher Yatzar upon waking in the morning, even if he has no need to relieve himself. The Bach explains that Asher Yatzar should be treated like any other of the morning daily berachos, birkos hashachar, which most authorities assume are recited even if someone did not have a specific reason to recite them – such as, he is not wearing shoes or he is unable to rise from bed. Thus, even if someone had no need to use the facilities upon arising, he still should recite Asher Yatzar in the morning. This position is held by many other poskim, particularly the Rema (Orach Chayim 4:1), although he does not explain why he holds this way (see Magen Avraham 4:2; Elyah Rabbah 4:1; Aruch Hashulchan, Orach Chayim 6:1; Mishnah Berurah 4:3). However, the Levush appears to disagree with this opinion of his rebbe, the Rema, and the Bach, implying that only someone who relieves himself recites the beracha Asher Yatzar, a position held by many other authorities (Arizal; Adei Zahav; Birkei Yosef).

The Levush himself (Orach Chayim 7:3) notes that the laws of Asher Yatzar should not be compared to the laws of berachos on food, since reciting Asher Yatzar is part of nature (we refer in English to a “call of nature”), whereas when and what we eat is an individual’s choice. The Levush and the Elyah Zuta (4: 1) both contend that this last distinction means that there is no time limit for reciting Asher Yatzar; however, the Chida questions whether this distinction makes any difference. In yet a third place (Orach Chayim 47:6 in his sidenote), the Levush again alludes to this topic, contending that, like the berachos prior to studying Torah, Asher Yatzar is not dependent on the time it takes to digest food. Other acharonim add another idea. The beracha of Asher Yatzar includes an acknowledgement that there are apertures in the body that must remain open. Since this is something that we must acknowledge always, it is always appropriate to recite this beracha. Furthermore, the beracha of Asher Yatzar includes acknowledgement of the removal of ruach ra, which happens when we wash our hands upon awakening and when washing our hands after using the facilities. As such, Asher Yatzar is always appropriate upon awaking in the morning (Bach; Elyah Rabbah). Among the many opinions explaining the Levush, many differences in halacha result. If the time for reciting Asher Yatzar never expires, someone who forgot to recite Asher Yatzar after relieving himself, when he remembers he should recite Asher Yatzar, regardless of how much time has transpired. According to the Adei Zahav, he should recite Asher Yatzar only within six hours of relieving himself.

Davening Outdoors

At this point, let us discuss the third of our opening questions: “Is it permitted to daven in the courtyard outside a shul?”

Based on a verse in Daniel (6:11), the Gemara (Berachos 34b) rules that a person should daven in a building that has windows. Rashi explains that looking at the sky humbles a person, causing him to daven with greater kavanah. The Gemara then quotes Rav Kahana that davening in an open field is considered an act of chutzpah. Rashi explains that davening in a place that is relatively not exposed, rather than an open field, creates greater fear of the King, and the individual’s stubborn heart is broken.

The poskim explain that this refers to a situation where the person has an alternative. However, someone traveling, and the best place to daven is an open field, may daven there, and it is not a chutzpah (Magen Avraham; Mishnah Berurah).

Tosafos asks: According to the Gemara, when Yitzchak went lasuach basadeh (Bereishis 24:63), he went to pray (Berachos 26b), so how could Rav Kahana call this an act of chutzpah?

Tosafos provides two answers to his question.

(1) Yitzchak went to Har Hamoriyah to daven, which is where the Beis Hamikdash would be built, implying that this is certainly a place that will create greater fear of Heaven and more humility.

(2) Rav Kahana is discouraging davening in an open place, where his prayer may be disturbed by passersby, whereas Yitzchak was in an area where there was no one to disturb him.

According to the second answer of Tosafos, there is nothing wrong with davening in a place that is completely exposed, as long as he is comfortable that no one will disturb his prayers. According to his first answer, this is not true. We should note that Rashi’s reason disagrees with Tosafos’s second answer, and Rashi may accept Tosafos’s first reason (see next paragraph).

The Beis Yosef questions Tosafos’s second answer: why did Rav Kahana say that davening outdoors is a chutzpah? The concern is not of chutzpah, but because he will get distracted. For this reason, he follows the first reason of Tosafos in his Shulchan Aruch, and quotes Rashi’s reasoning: “A person should not pray in an open area, such as a field, because someone in a non-exposed place has greater fear of the King and his heart is broken” (Orach Chayim 90:5). We should note that several prominent poskim provide various explanations why Tosafos was not bothered by the Beis Yosef’s question (see Perisha, Bach, Taz, Magein Giborim, all in Orach Chayim 90).

The Magen Avraham (90:6) adds to this discussion by quoting the Zohar that implies that a person should daven inside a building. The Chida reports to us that the Batei Kehunah wrote a great deal about this topic. He concluded that it is sufficient if the area is enclosed, but it is not necessary for it to be roofed. The Birkei Yosef (Orach Chayim 90:2) notes that great rabbis often pray in the unroofed courtyards of shullen.

The Mishnah Berurah concludes this topic with the following ruling: Notwithstanding that the Shulchan Aruch rejected Tosafos’s approach, many acharonim justify this answer that it is acceptable to daven outdoors in a place where someone will not be disturbed. A traveler may daven outdoors, but should preferably daven under trees, if practical. However, someone who is home should not rely on this, and should daven indoors (Mishnah Berurah 90:11). Thus, it would seem that, according to the Mishnah Berurah, it is incorrect to daven outdoors in the courtyard of a shul when he has the option of davening in the shul itself. On the other hand, Sefardim, who tend to follow the conclusions of the Chida, probably have a strong halachic basis to daven inside gates, even if there is no roof above them, relying on the Chida who followed the ruling of his rebbe, Rav Yitzchak Rapaport, the author of the Batei Kehunah.

Conclusion:

The power of tefillah is very great. Through tefillah one can save lives, bring people closer to Hashem and overturn harsh decrees. We have to believe in this power. One should not think, “Who am I to daven to Hashem?” Rather, we must continually drive home the concept that

Hashem wants our tefillos and He listens to them! Let us hope that Hashem will accept our tefillos together with those of all Klal Yisrael!

Rabbi YY Jacobson

We Need to Get Rid Of the Inferiority Complex -- Why Our First and Greatest Leader Never Ate Schmaltz Herring

It Takes a Village

It is one of the great questions about the most impactful Jewish teacher. Why did Providence have it that our first and greatest leader be raised among non-Jews, and even worse, in the home of their archenemy, Pharaoh?

“It takes a village to raise a child,” the old saying goes. No man is an island. We all grow up within a community and are molded by our environment. Nurture, not only nature, craft our identities. We all recall from childhood the “strange uncle,” the “eccentric aunt,” the “insane neighbor,” the “saintly grandmother,” the “stingy owner of the candy store,” the “stern teacher,” the “angry bakery owner,” each of whom left impressions on our psyche and affected our way of dealing with the world around us.

It certainly “takes a village to raise a Jewish child.” Judaism is a family and community faith. We all have memories of Passover with our parents, grandparents, and extended family. We recall the “humorous Rabbi,” the “impatient gabbai,” the “beloved shamash,” the “sweet bubbly,” the “hypocritical teacher,” the “brilliant mentor,” who conferred upon us our own interpretation of Jewish identity, for good or for better. As we grow up among Jews, we absorb the culture, the heritage, the faith, the world-outlook, the sigh, and the laugh of our people. Never underestimate the power of schmaltz herring and chicken soup: It is how generations of grandmothers have passed on their love and wisdom to generations that came after them.

Yet the first Jewish leader, who molded us into a people, our greatest prophet and teacher, the transmitter of Torah, grew up without Jewish parents, without a Jewish family, without a Jewish environment, without a community of Jews, completely absorbed in a non-Jewish culture and environment.

What is even stranger is that he grew up in the palace of Pharaoh, the monarch of the superpower of the time, the tyrant who has been systematically exterminating the Jewish people. Imagine, Moses—the great redeemer and teacher of Israel—essentially grew up in the home of a Stalin, or a Hitler! Why?

We know the technicalities of the story. Pharaoh’s daughter, Batya, went to bathe in the Nile River and found a little baby floating in a basket on the Nile. She retrieved the basket, rescued the child, and took him in as a son. G-d’s imagination is fertile. He could have arranged for another Egyptian, not Pharaoh’s daughter, to take in the child.^[1] Or, better yet, that somehow Moses would remain among his family and his people, absorbing the energy and ideology of the Jewish people?

The US President

You all recall the controversy around the status of President Obama, triggered by President Donald Trump. The American Constitution places certain restrictions on those who may be eligible to the Office of the President of the United States. These eligibility requirements can be found in Article two, Section one, Paragraph five of the constitution, which reads as follows:

“No person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any Person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty-five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.”

There is logic to this law. To serve as an adequate leader, you need to be a “homegrown potato.” You need to have been raised “among the people, by the people, with the people,” so that you can truly understand “the people.” To be sure, some of the great Jewish scholars and leaders were converts: Shmaya and Avtalyon, Rabbi Meir, Rabbi Akiva, Onkelus the Translator (whose Aramaic translation of Torah is printed in virtually every edition of the Hebrew Bible), and many more—yet, at

least the father and progenitor of all Jewish leaders should have received some hands-on experience from Jews.

Dr. Sigmund Freud’s final book was titled Moses and Monotheism. It was published in 1939, by which time Freud had taken refuge in Britain. He, too, was perturbed by the above question and thus reached the absurd conclusion that Moses was the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; he really was a prince of Egypt.

So we are back to our original question: Why?

The Question of Ibn Ezra

The question has been raised by one of the most important Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages, Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra, who lived in the 12th century in Spain. He was a sage, philosopher, physician, astronomer, astrologist, poet, linguist, and mathematician.^[2] He wrote a commentary on the Torah that is studied to this very day.

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra was born in Tudela, Spain, but spent most of his life wandering from one country to another, always restless, always seeking knowledge, writing his books, teaching students, and always living in great poverty, depending on people’s patronage. In one of his personal poems he ironically says that at his nativity the stars change their natural course to bring him misfortune, so much so that if he decided to sell candles the sun would never set, and if he decided to sell burial shrouds, no one would ever die.

Let us turn to Ibn Ezra’s prolific pen:^[3]

ומחשבות ה' עמוקו, ומ' יכול לנצח עליות.

G-d’s thoughts are deep and mysterious, who can grasp His secret? Only He comprehends His schemes!

You just got Judaism 101. The first answer Jews always give is: We don’t understand. We don’t get it. Why did Moses have to grow up in the bosom of Pharaoh? Answer: I don’t know. So the Lord desired.

But, of course, we never stop there. Ibn Ezra goes on to give two powerful speculations why G-d desired this pattern.

Keep the Distance

Answer #1:^[4]

יעוד דבר אחר, כי אלו היה גדול בין אחיו ויכרתו מנעריו, לא היו יראם ממן, כי חשבו ה' כהן מהם.

The first answer is a somewhat satirical comment about Jewish culture, and it holds true to this day. Had Moses grown up among Jews, he would have never garnered the respect and awe he needed in order to lead them to redemption and mold them into greatness.

Had Moses been raised in the Yeshiva and in the community, there would have always been the guys in the back of the synagogue who would come up to him after his speech, pat him on his back, and say “Hey Mosheleh, we miss the days when you played football with us outside? When did you become so serious?”

And when he would come down from Sinai with the Torah, there would always be an old grandmother, who would say to him: “I remember you as a baby in your crib. Oy vey, you did not stop crying, but you were so cute. Your endless sobs made your mother miserable; today, you’re such a big shot. But I must tell you, you are still so cute...”

And there would always be the wise guys from the “kiddush club” who would react to any serious sermon he gave: “Moses? Come take a drink.”

You know the anecdote: When President Dwight Eisenhower met with Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, the American president said: “It is very hard to be the president of 170 million people.” Ben-Gurion responded: “It’s harder to be the prime minister of 2 million prime ministers.”

When you grow up with people from childhood, it is hard for them to truly submit to your authority, even if you deserve it. “You can’t be a prophet in your own town,” is the ancient expression.^[5] There is always someone who remembers how he used to change your diapers and will make sure to remind you of it.

So Providence has Moses growing up among non-Jews. No Jew ever saw him run around in the yard of shul playing baseball and eating potato chips; no one ever saw him getting a spanking or taking extra ice cream at the kiddush; no one ever babysat for him. The distance was necessary for Moses to become who he needed to become.

A Majestic Attitude

Answer #2:

Now, Ibn Ezra gives a second explanation:

אولي סבב ה' זה שיגדל משה בבית המלוכה להזיה נפשו על מדרגה העליונה בדרך הרים והרגליות, ולא תהייה שפלה ונגילה להזיה בבית עבדים. הלא תראה, שההג המצרי בעבור שהוא עשה חמס. והושיע בנות מדין מהרעים, בעבור שהוא עשיהם חמס להשquet צאנן מהמים שדלו.

Perhaps G-d caused Moses to grow up in the home of royalty so that his soul would be accustomed to a higher sense of learning and behavior, and he would not feel lowly and accustomed to dwelling in a house of slavery. Indeed you see that he killed an Egyptian who did a criminal act [beating an innocent Hebrew to death], and he saved the Midianite girls from the criminal shepherds who were irrigating their own flock from the water the girls have drawn.

The curse of the Egyptian exile consisted not only of the physical slave labor, and the horrible oppression of the Hebrews. It also inculcated within the Hebrews an exile-like mentality. Many of them learned to see their misery as an inherent reality. When you are abused as a slave for so many years, you sometimes become accustomed to the darkness and cease to sense the extraordinary degradation of your situation.

You might remember the old anecdote. Two Jewish men in Tsarist Russia were being led out to a firing squad: one, a humble tailor, the other a wild anarchist. As the Tsarist officer in charge of the firing squad tried to put a blindfold on the condemned anarchist, the young Jew fought back. He would face death unblinkingly, he said bravely. Alarmed, his fellow Jew interceded: "Please, don't make trouble!"

This is why the redeemer of Israel needed to grow up in the Egyptian palace, not among his own people. Had Moses grown up among the Hebrew slaves, he too would have suffered from a slave paradigm, lacking the courage to fight injustice and devoid of the ability to mold an enslaved tribe into a great people with a vision of transforming the world. He might have not found within himself the strength to dream of liberty and confront the greatest tyrant of the time. Because he grew up in a royal ambiance, free of physical and psychological shackles, Moses had a clear sense of the horrific injustice and felt the power to fight it. He was raised in an atmosphere of broadness, of endless possibilities. He felt like a prince, not a slave. Thus he can overthrow the government.

The Two Stories About Moses

Ibn Ezra proves this from the two stories the Torah shares about Moses before he was chosen to become a leader.

The opening story the Torah tells us of Moses as an active adult (besides his birth) that went out to his brothers, saw an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moses killed the Egyptian and saved an innocent life.

Why was he the only one who stopped the Egyptian from beating the Jew? Why did no one else kill the Egyptian? Because a slave often surrenders himself to his pitiful fate.

What is the subsequent story in the Torah about Moses? Due to his act of aggression, he is forced to escape to Midian. Once again he finds himself embroiled in yet another conflict. He witnesses the local shepherds bullying a group of girls who were first in line to draw water from a well. He immediately rises to their defense, driving off the offending shepherds.

Moses was a stranger who had just arrived in town. Who asked him to intervene? Who asked him to get involved? Especially after he saw the trouble he endured after the first time he stood up for an innocent victim. The answer is that someone who grew up in a house of royalty has the courage and the assertiveness to take charge and administer justice wherever it is called for. He had the mindset and the confidence not to allow bullies to bully innocent young women.

Molotov the Follower

There was a time in the nineteen forties when Vyacheslav Molotov was Soviet foreign minister. He was a shrewd man and a hard bargainer but worked for Joseph Stalin, who was The Boss. He was once overheard talking to Stalin by trans-Atlantic telephone during the course of some very intricate negotiations with the West. He said, "Yes, Comrade Stalin," in quiet tones, then again, "Yes, Comrade Stalin, and then, after

a considerable wait, "Certainly, Comrade Stalin." Suddenly he was galvanized into emotion. "No, Comrade Stalin," he barked, "No. That's, no. Definitely, no. A thousand times, no!"

After a while, he quieted and it was "Yes, Comrade Stalin," again. The reporter who overheard this was probably never so excited in his life. Clearly, Molotov was daring to oppose the dictator on at least one point, and it would surely be important to the West to know what that point might be.

The reporter approached Molotov and said as calmly as possible, Secretary Molotov, I could not help but hear you say at one point, "No, Comrade Stalin."

Molotov turned his cold eyes on the reporter and said, "What of it?"

"May I ask," said the reporter, cautiously, "What the subject under discussion was at that time?"

"You may," said Molotov. "Comrade Stalin asked me if there was anything which he had said with which I disagreed."

Are You a Slave?

This is true for each of our lives.

Many of us, after being subjected to dysfunctional conditions for a time, learn to somehow tolerate it and accept it as the innate condition of our lives. This can be worse than the condition itself, since it guarantees no way out.

We must cultivate in ourselves and in our loved ones the feeling of royalty. "The greatest tragedy," said the Chassidic master Rabbi Aaron of Karlin, "is when the prince believes he is a peasant," when you settle for less because you think you are destined to slavery. You don't see yourself as a prince, as a child of G-d, and hence lack that feeling that you can rewrite your future and achieve your ultimate potential.

One Day of Sleep

You know the story of Senator David Rice Atchison.

When President-elect Zachary Taylor refused to be inaugurated on the scheduled date of March 4, 1850, because it was a Sunday and the Christian Sabbath, he moved his inauguration to the next day. This would leave the nation without a president for 24 hours, because Taylor's predecessor, President James Polk, was leaving office as scheduled on Sunday at noon.

The rules of succession left Senator Atchison in line to be president for that one day.

Unfortunately, Senator Atchison, fond of food and drink, overdid things at the inauguration parties on Saturday night and into the wee hours of the next day, and left strict instructions not to be awakened at all on Sunday. By the time he woke up and emerged, it was Monday afternoon. He had slept through his entire presidency.

Is this not the story of some of our lives? We sleep through our presidency. We sleep through great possibilities, as we forget that each of our souls is infinite, a "fragment of the Divine." Instead of living lives of greatness, we settle for mediocrity. We forget that though not always great ourselves, we are connected to greatness beyond ourselves. We are the sons and daughters of royalty, and we were given the gift to bring healing to G-d's world.

We convince ourselves that we can't be any kinder, or more compassionate, or less angry, or more understanding. We convince ourselves that our marriages are destined to fail and that the fighting in the house will endure. We think like slaves: what was yesterday will be tomorrow, and I am always a victim.

When you see yourself as a victim, you become a victim.

It is true for us as individuals and for Jews as a collective. The world is embarrassed by Jews who are embarrassed with themselves; the world respects and admires Jews who respect themselves and their Judaism.

In our present battle, too, we must get rid of our inferiority complex. We must stand up to evil with unwavering courage and conviction. Our mission is to be ambassadors of love and truth, and never compromise the truth for falsehood and evil. When we let go of moral clarity and leadership, the world suffers. When we embrace our royalty, the world is liberated.

[1] This is how the Maharal states the question in Gevuros Hashem ch. 18

[2] Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089 — 1164) was born in Tudela, Spain in 1089, and died on the 4th of Shevat (January 24) 1167, apparently in Calahorra. He was one of the most distinguished Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages.

[3] Ibn Ezra to Exodus 2:3

[4] Actually, in the Ibn Ezra, this is answer #2.

[5] Ahavas Olam By Rabi Shmuel Algazi; Abarbenel, in his commentary Zevach Pesach on the Haggadah Shel Pesach; Midrash Shmuel to Avos 3:11 ("Hamechalel es hakadashim") in the name of "Chazal"; Commentary of Rabbi Yosef Yavvatz to Avos ibis; Responsa, Chasam Sofer Coshen Mishpat section 22: "Chazal said that ein navei leero" (Fascinating: He brings this as a source for an actual halacha, that we choose a rabbi who comes from a different city.) He also states this in his Responsa, ibid. section 196. We did not as of yet find an ancient source in "Chazal" for this statement. See here for a longer discussion and many more sources: <http://forum.otzar.org/viewtopic.php?t=23144>

Rabbi Norman Lamm Va'yehi

The Jewish Center - January 5, 1974

"THE MOOD IN ISRAEL"

My recent trip to Israel, from which I returned this past week, was qualitatively different from my many previous trips. I am still in the grip of the mood of the country--indeed too much so to be objective. I shall therefore leave the analysis for some other occasion, and offer now my personal impressions, given without claim to special expertise and without having been privy to any inside information.

The mood in Israel today is not a simple or homogeneous one. It is quite complicated and often contradictory. Instead of describing it in over-all terms, it is best to identify the ingredients of this mood.

Perhaps the best way to begin is by observing the difference between us and the Israelis. During the first several days of the war, we recited tehillim (Psalms) at our daily services, and read the "Prayer for the State of Israel" with special fervor. But after a week or two we stopped, feeling that the danger had passed. In Israel, to this day, every service includes the recitation of tehillim.

It is true that the deep gloom has lifted somewhat both because of the Geneva conference (although Israelis hardly trust it) and the increase in tourism. The rise of tourism is uplifting for

Israelis, especially since they correctly consider it as the barometer of what the world thinks of Israel's chances, much as the stock-market is a psychological indicator. It is hard to emphasize how important it is for us American Jews to visit Israel now.

But sadness remains a primary ingredient of the mood, and it is very real. אבלות (mourning) grips so many of those who have lost members of their families and those who have lost friends or whose friends are in mourning. Never before have I seen so many people, especially children, rise to recite the orphan's kaddish in synagogues. It is not uncommon to see maimed or bandaged young men on the street. In many neighborhoods or kibbutzim the population is heavily female, with hardly a man in sight. A young lady from America, who accompanied her father on a trip, noticed that many of the bus drivers were wearing caps (kippots), far in excess of what she had noticed three years ago when she previously visited the country. She was bold enough to ask one of the bus drivers of the Egged line in Jerusalem whether they had suddenly begun to employ more datiim (religious Jews) as drivers. The driver explained that many of them are Sephardim, and that the custom amongst them is that when they are in mourning for a close relative, they wear the kippah the whole year...

Even for the survivors there is not complete joy. For instance, youngsters in Jerusalem get a bit nervous when they hear the sound of jet planes overhead--reminding them of the jet planes they heard that Yom Kippur day. When I visited the yeshiva in Gush Etzion, I found a pervasive sadness because one third of the student body was present--those who come from overseas; the Israeli students are serving at the fronts. Shortly after my arrival, I received a telephone call from a

colleague who teaches at the Tel Aviv University and who called to say hello because he had heard that I was in the country. We exchanged courtesies, and then I asked him about the situation. He broke down, crying over the phone, and explained that he had just begun to teach three days earlier, on Sunday, when the universities of the country opened up the first time since the war. He told me that he met many of his old students who had survived, but that though they may be whole in body, they were not whole in mind and heart. Some had been in Egyptian captivity, and reported to him that the tortures were so sadistic, so incredible, that they will never be the same. My colleague was dreadfully upset that this was remaining a secret, but apparently the government believes that, for diplomatic reasons, it is best not to publicize this fact. Some of the men who underwent these experiences were perplexed: at least the Nazis had an "ideology" about Jews being sub-humans and dangerous, but the Egyptians had no reasons whatsoever to perform their acts of mad sadism.

However, with this sadness there is another intangible element that I find extremely difficult to describe. I do not know how to identify it, whether as a peculiar Jewish historical awareness or an intensified grief. Perhaps it is best to refer to it as a special kind of dignity which allows one to keep his sanity and dignity intact in the face of the consciousness of all the grief of Jewish history telescoped into the short span of one's own lifetime. The story was told by President Katzir at the Seminar I attended. He decided to pay a condolence call to a father who had lost a son in battle. He came to the home, and offered his words of consolation to the father. After a while, the father looked up, thanked the President, and said to him: "Yes, I am consoled. I feel better this time than I did thirty years ago. Then the Germans killed my father, but I never knew where his grave is; now at least, the Arabs killed my son and I know where he is buried..."

In addition to sadness and what might be called dignity, there is also the element of powerful anger. There is a feeling, especially amongst soldiers who were at the front, that they were betrayed by the government's negligence. What is called the מלחמה, the terrible neglect and failures of the security set-up, are being investigated by a national commission of inquiry. But no matter what they will find, the charisma of the old leaders is dissipated, the halos are wilted, and no longer do they appear as shining and faultless heroes. One hopes that both Israelis and Jews of the Diaspora will now become a bit more sophisticated, and see people as only people, without looking for new heroes.

Part of this anger is revealed in the unusual kind of pre-election propaganda that appeared in the Israeli press this past week. I do not remember ever having heard anything of this sort. For instance, the מערך (Alignment), the major political party, announced to the voters: אתה רוצח להעניש את המערך, "You want to punish the Alignment--but consider what the alternative is..." In the English press in Israel, the same party published something of this sort: "You hold the government responsible--but that is still better than an irresponsible government..." In other words, it is an open secret, to which the major party confesses, that they are responsible and punishable but they ask for reelection because the others are even worse. All these are signs of a justifiable inner fury.

Following from this is, quite naturally, a feeling of frustration. Often, elections play a cathartic role, they allow the voter to vent his spleen, to get rid of his emotional excess. That did not happen this time in Israel. The elections proved--almost nothing at all.

A distinguished columnist in Israel, Eliyahu Amiqam, wrote on the eve of the election what he once heard from a Communist Polish professor of law, who was an observer at the Eichman trial, about Polish elections, and he applied it as well to the current Israeli elections--namely, that it is a sign of paradise. What does that mean? Because in Paradise, God took Adam, brought him to Eve, and said, "Here, choose a wife!" And so, Adam freely chose Eve...

The Israeli voter did not feel that he had a real, clear, decisive choice to make. The structure of Israeli politico is such that he was confused. Polls show that about 40% of the electorate was undecided on the eve of the election. Hawks and Doves are not clearly definable in Israel. The

extreme of either position is probably rejected by the great majority of all voters.

Often, hawk and doves coexist within the same person.

And then there is a feeling of suspiciousness as an important element in the mood of

Israel, a suspiciousness which results from Israel's isolation. Some one put it well in the American press: "in every warm heart there is a cold spot for the Jews." One can hardly meet a single Israeli who does not believe with all his heart that the Arabs have only one ultimate aim: *החסול המוני*, the dismemberment of the state. Israeli Arabists expect really nothing of substance to emerge from the current Geneva conversations. Dr. Kissinger is the topic of incessant conversation amongst the Israelis, much of it speculative and unrealistic. Israelis keep reminding themselves several times a day that Kissinger is really the foreign minister of the United States, not of Israel...

Counter-balancing all these negative elements in the national mood, are several brighter aspects. One of them is a manifestation of a great and noble Jewish virtue: gratitude. Israelis are grateful. They are grateful to President Nixon, much to the chagrin of many American Jewish liberals. They are grateful to Jews of the Diaspora for their assistance--although, speaking for myself, I find that it is embarrassing, because I believe that American Jews could have done much more. They are especially grateful to Holland. During one of the days I was in Israel, young people stood at street corners in the large cities and distributed little red round stickers, to be placed on the lapel. They were in the shape of an orange, symbol of Israel, and within it was a windmill, representative of Holland. And on the perimeter were the words: *עם ישראל מוקיר את העם ההולנדי*, "The people of Israel loves (or cherishes) the people of Holland."

Perhaps it will be a good idea for some American Jewish businessmen to build a proper, kosher, and lavish hotel in Holland, and for American Jewish organizations to encourage tourism, so that after Israel, Holland will be the favorite place for American Jewish tourists--more than Paris, London, Tokyo, or even Puerto Rico.

There is also an element of justifiable pride in what Israel has accomplished. President Aber Harnen of Hebrew University was right when he said that Israel on Yom Kippur was defending the right of every little country to exist. Israelis know that if the Arabs were to destroy Israel, no little nation in the world would ever be safe. They take pride in the valor of their soldiers, non-professionals who fought against overwhelming odds.

Especially magnificent was the role of the students of Yeshivot ha-Hesder, those "modern yeshivot" whose students served in the army alternatively with studying at the yeshiva. These schools lost a disproportionately high number of their students, because it was they who were serving in the tank and paratroop corps on both fronts on that Yom Kippur day. Furthermore, students from such schools as Kerem Beyavneh, Har Etzion, Yeshivat Hakotel, Shalavim, etc., were also volunteering to serve as officiants during the High Holidays services. Their losses, their valor, their bravery, constitute a great modern instance of kiddush hashem.

Finally, I detected a new and deep questing and questioning. It is too early to call it *התעוררות דתית*, a religious renaissance. Sometimes, if one hurries to identify a new movement, he nips it in the bud and effectively kills it. What we are now witnessing is something much slower than the upsurge of feelings after the Six Day War, when we saw the pictures of paratroopers crying as they embraced the Wall. I feel that what is now going on is, perhaps because it is slower and more halting, something that is more profound and lasting than the euphoria of six years ago. It is a deeper, sadder, larger view of the tragic dimension of life, and with it comes a search for meaning. And the search for meaning is already a religious and spiritual quest.

One detects a kind of teshuva, repentance, for the previous arrogance, over-confidence, and cockiness of so many Israelis, a feeling of regret and contrition for their loss of idealism which made them look more and more like American middle-class Jews.

There is a feeling, vague and inchoate, but conscious nonetheless, that the Yom Kippur War meant something, but they are not quite sure what it meant.

Perhaps this developing attitude for the Israeli during the Yom Kippur War can best be explained in terms of something we read in this morning's Sidra. Jacob, the dying patriarch, called his children about him, *וְאַסְפּוּ וְאֶגְדָּה לְכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר יֹكְרָא אֲתֶכְם בְּאַהֲרִית הַיּוֹם*, "Gather around me and I will tell you what shall befall you in the end of days." It seems clear that Jacob intends to prophecy for his children, predicting to them their ultimate fate. Yet, after we read his poetic words, we notice that they are predictive only to a very minor extent, that they are mostly a combination of *חוכמה* and *ברכה*, of rebuke and blessing, and of a description of the collective character of his children. Somehow, then, the major body of Jacob's words does not follow clearly from his prefatory remark. Perhaps that is why the Rabbis, in the Midrash and in the Talmud, maintain that something happened at this moment: *בַּיּוֹם יְעַקֹּב לְגָלוֹת אֶת הַקָּץ וּנְסִתְלָקָה מִמְנוּשָׁכָה* Jacob indeed desired to reveal to his children the end of days, the advent of Messiah, but at that moment the Divine Spirit departed from him and so he lost his predictive-prophetic faculty.

However, if I be permitted to offer an alternative explanation, I would say that Jacob never intended to prophesy to his children any detailed program of redemption at the end of days. Note carefully that the word he uses is not *קָרְבָּה*, which we would normally expect in Hebrew as "befall" or "happen," but *קָרָא*, which literally means, "call." What Jacob meant to tell his children is this: I want to describe to you your own inner qualities, so that, at the end of days, no matter what the situation is, no matter what events present themselves to you, you will perceive them as challenges, as a summons from on high to respond with nobility and generosity, as a call from God to rise to new achievements and to greater heights.

Jews recognize that Yom Kippur War was such a *קָרְבָּה*, such a call. It was a summons and a challenge. It revealed something. But we are not quite sure what that was.

Hence, requests for *תְּשִׁמְשֵׁי קָדְשָׁה*, for religious articles such as tefillin and copies of tehillim (Psalms). I am fully aware that for many soldiers the little book of Psalms was more of a talisman than an opportunity to read words which would inspire them religiously. The request for tefillin has been derided by some as "foxhole religion." But that does not bother me. Better foxhole religion than penthouse atheism. I prefer that people come to religion out of gratitude and affluence, but the fact is that most people achieve a deeper recognition of their condition through crisis and hardship. What counts is the end result.

I might add that the Chabad people are not the only group who are distributing tefillin. The same is being done by Gesher, by the Mizrachi, by many small organizations of great significance, and by many private individuals who fill up their car with candy, liquor, cigarettes, and tallit and tefillin.

During the time I was in Israel, a small article appeared in the Israeli press which shows that the tefillin campaign even reaches beyond Israeli troops. Chabad people were at the Suez front, in the western bridgehead of the Israeli army in Africa, and were offering the tefillin to Israeli soldiers. The UN team was nearby, and engaged the Chabad people in conversation, inquiring after the meaning of the tefillin and their particular garb. One UN official was particularly persistent and inquisitive in his questions, and upon inquiry he revealed that he was a Swede by the name of Joseph Bergson. Are you Jewish? One of the Lubavitcher people asked.

Yes, he was. Before five minutes were over, Joseph Bergson of the UN commission was "davening" in his tefillin...

My own experience confirm this new quest. Three years ago I spoke to troops several times, younger boys and girls, and I found that it was not always easy to communicate with them. I felt, uneasily, that I was simply not on the same wave-length. I detected indifference, an anxiousness to emphasize the "normalcy" of Israel and the Jewish

people, an aversion to considering themselves as different and special, and a closed mind to the religious word.

It is different today. I was asked to address troops, first in the Canal and then in Syria, but the “full high alert” prevented that. Instead I went to the Bikaah, on the Jordanian front, nearly half a kilometer from Jordanian soldiers. A Hasidic band played and another speaker and I addressed the troops. Our themes were Israel as the *הַבָּהָר*, the Chosen People; *עַמּוֹנָה* faith; not wasting their special talents; questioning, searching. I found them not only receptive, but also participating. And in the dancing there was sheer ecstasy. Here were 300 soldiers, combat engineers, who took time out from laying mines and anti-tank traps, 80% or more officially “non-religious,” who sang and danced to such songs as *עמַם יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי* and other, new melodies both from American and Israel, with the abandon that comes from *דָבְקָה*, or religious fervor. As one visitor pointed out, it was like a Hasidic wedding, without a bride and a groom.

In conclusion, I would like to share with you one story that I heard, first person, from a brother of a cousin of mine. It tells us something about the hope and the feelings that motivate our Israeli brothers. This young man emigrated with his very young family from the Lower East Side and he became an Israeli citizen. He was assigned to the reserves that served on the Bar Lev Line on that fateful Yom Kippur day.

Ephraim was one of 200 men, whom he referred to humorously as “third class infantry soldiers,” most of them married with children, in the 24-38 year old bracket. These were part of the *חטיבת ירושלים*, the brigade of soldiers drawn from the Jerusalem area, the one that was most hard hit during the war, stationed near Kantara.

Ephraim told me of how they were attacked by 50,000-60,000 Egyptian soldiers, how the more he picked the enemy soldiers off with his machine gun, the more swarmed over the Canal. After several hours of battle, his own group was mauled and many of his close friends killed or wounded. Shortly thereafter, there came the order from his commander for his group to withdraw back into the desert toward the Israeli lines. Some 47 men departed and broke into two groups, as they made their way through the minefields back to their own lines. Ephraim and 22 others broke off from the rest of the troops, and they decided that each could take but one object with him. Most men chose an Uzi, the submachine gun. Ephraim took an Uzi but also decided to take along his tallit, and one of the other men chose a pair of tefillin. For one and a half days they made their way through the desert, avoiding enemy fire. Then they noticed that they were caught in cross-fire, in between the Egyptian and Israeli lines, both sides firing on them. The Egyptians assumed, correctly, that they were Israeli soldiers. The Israelis thought, incorrectly, that they were Egyptians. At one point they made their way to the top of a hill, behind some bushes. The Israeli tanks thought that they were enemy tanks, and instead of firing with machine guns, aimed their cannon at the 22 Israeli soldiers. The cannon fire kept on getting closer, while the soldiers tried desperately to get a wavelength on their wireless radio to contact the tanks and tell them they are Israelis. But it was all to no avail and they expected the worst. And what seemed the last moment, Ephraim realized that he had with him the best form of communication: he unfurled his tallit and waved it. At first, the Israeli tanks thought it was an Egyptian robe, but they quickly recognized it, got out of the tanks and beckoned to them to run over. Thus were 22 Jewish souls saved because of Ephraim’s tallit.

Ephraim told me, after repeating this story, that he just “knows” that holding the Egyptians down the first two or three days was something that could not be explained by natural, logical, military categories or concepts. Something more was at work. It is inconceivable, he told me, that this was anything but a miracle--and the miracle came soaked in pain and grief and anguish...

I conclude this description of Israel’s mood with the story of Ephraim Holland and his tallit, not because I believe in the magical properties of religious artifacts. I do not. But to me it is symbolic, deeply and gloriously, of Israel, its faith, and its great hope for its future.

Recall that Israel’s colors, white and blue, originally were chosen because the *תְּכִלָּת* and *לְבָן*, the white and blue tzitzit that once were part of the tallit. (Now it is all white).

The tallit is thus the symbol of Israel, both state and people, and it is the tallit, and the faith in the Almighty that it represents, that can and will save us.

When donning the tallit in the morning, many pious Jews recite a preliminary prayer in which, amongst other things, we say:

ועִזּוֹת אַמְּצָת זָפָל נְפָשִׁי רַוִּיחַ וְנִשְׁמָתִי וְתִפְלָתִי מִן הַחַיְצָבִים וְהַטְּלִיתִים קְרַבְתִּי עַל גָּבוֹנִים בָּרוּךְ.

“And by virtue of my observance of the commandment of the tzitzit, may my soul be saved from all dangers and demonic forces in the world. May the tallit raise its corners over me and protect me, like an eagle spreading its wings over its nest to protect its young.”

May that tallit be the symbol of the wings of the Shekhinah, as the Almighty God of Israel offers us protection and security and love, so that we may go into the uncertain future calmly, prayerfully, successfully--and peacefully.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemos

Remove Your Shoes: The Place You Stand Upon Is Holy Ground

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand’s Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1276 — Cap and Gown at Graduation: Is There A Halachic Problem? Good Shabbos!

I would like to begin my remarks by sharing a true story that I experienced. Some time ago, I was in Europe for the summer as a scholar in residence on a tour of different European cities. One of the countries we visited was Hungary. The tour arrived at the banks of the Danube River in Budapest, at what is called “The Shoe Memorial.” A very famous sculptor created a formation of metal shoes secured to the ground along the Danube.

Up until 1944, Adolf Hitler had a peace treaty with Hungary. That is why the Hungarian Jews were not directly affected by the Holocaust until 1944. Jews in Poland and Germany and all over Europe were already rounded up for execution several years earlier, but Hungarian Jews initially escaped exportation because of Hitler’s peace treaty with Hungary.

In 1944, Hitler broke the peace treaty, and it became open season on Hungarian Jews, who were deported to concentration camps in 1944 and 1945. Adolph Eichman was in charge of exporting and exterminating Hungarian Jewry. When the treaty was originally broken, there was a Fascist group in Hungary called the Arrow-Cross, which could not wait for Germany’s exports, and they started killing Jews themselves in Hungary itself.

They would line up Jews on the banks of the Danube River and mow them down. The Jews fell backwards into the river giving rise to the famous quote – the Blue Danube literally turned red! But before the Arrow-Cross murderers did that, they made the Jews take off their shoes. Shoes were precious in those days, and they wanted to salvage the Jews’ shoes for themselves.

To commemorate this horrible genocide, the above-mentioned sculptor went ahead and fashioned a twenty-foot section of the embankment with various shoes – of men, women, and children.

Our group went to this very moving site. I pointed out the irony that even though this was not the intention of the Arrow-Cross, “The place where we are standing is a *makom kadosh* (holy place).” Why did I call it a holy place? It is because any Jew who is killed simply because he is a Jew is a kadosh. He has died *al pi Kiddush Hashem* (as a martyr who sanctifies G-d’s Name).

In this week’s parsha, regarding a holy place, the pasuk says “Do not draw near, remove your shoes from your feet for the place which you stand upon is holy ground.” (Shemos 3:5). It is ironic. In this particular place, by the banks of the Danube River, the Jews took off their shoes. But I made the comment that there is something else that we can learn

from that incident where Moshe Rabbeinu was told to take off his shoes at the Burning Bush:

We all know the story. Moshe Rabbeinu saw a burning bush – one of the iconic images of the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. The pasuk says, “And Hashem saw that Moshe turned to draw near and investigate...” (Shemos 3:4) Both the pasuk and Chazal make a big deal of the fact that Moshe Rabbeinu went to check it out. But let us ask: What is the big deal here? Wouldn’t anyone seeing a burning bush that was not being consumed try to get a better look and check out what was happening? Of course they would! People run to view a burning building which defies no laws of nature. Here, a miraculous event was transpiring. Certainly, any person would want to go and investigate the matter!

The Sforno on that pasuk makes the following comment: “He went to see what was happening – l’his’bonen ba’davar (to contemplate upon the matter). Moshe was not just interested in the sight. L’his’bonen ba’davar means he wanted to comprehend “What does this mean? What is the significance of the phenomenon I am witnessing?” Moshe understood that he was being sent a message. The Ribono shel Olam was making an open miracle, which He does not do on a daily basis. “What is the Ribono shel Olam telling me?”

That was the greatness of Moshe Rabbeinu. He saw something noteworthy and it immediately prompted him to ask himself – What is the Ribono shel Olam trying to tell me?

The Ribono shel Olam was trying to tell Moshe that this burning bush, which was not being consumed, was going to represent the history of Klal Yisrael. We went down to Mitzrayim and the Egyptians tried to eradicate us, but we survived. This is something that has been going on for the last three thousand years. Whether it was the Egyptian exile, the Babylonian exile, the Greek exile, or the Roman exile; whether it was the destruction of the batei mikdash, whether it was the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition, the decrees of Tac”h v’Ta”t (1648/1649), or whether it was the Holocaust, they have tried to eradicate us just like in Mitzrayim. **BUT THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED.** That is the defining visual icon of Klal Yisrael. They can keep trying to burn us, but the bush will not be consumed. This is the message that Moshe Rabbeinu took out of this incident.

This tour in Hungary that I accompanied took place in July 2014. The previous March, there was a conference of European rabbis, who held a ceremony at the site of this Shoe Memorial, commemorating the 70th anniversary of the start of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry. The Kalover Rebbe (Menachem Mendel Taub, 1923-2018) was present at that ceremony. The Kalover Rebbe was a Hungarian rav, who was deported to Auschwitz. He survived the war and then became a Rebbe of Kalover Chassidim in Yerushalayim. He spoke at that ceremony commemorating what had happened there seventy years earlier!

The Kalover Chassidim have a niggun which many people may have heard. It is actually a Hungarian tune, without Jewish origin, but it has been adopted by Kalover Chassidim. The Kalover Rebbe got up at this anniversary commemoration and sang this niggun. It was incredibly moving that there were a group of young boys, ten- or eleven-year-old Hungarian boys, cheder boys with long payos, singing this song together with their Rebbe.

If there was ever an embodiment of “the bush could not be consumed,” this was it! Seventy years earlier, the Fascists tried to eradicate Hungarian Jewry, along with the rest of world Jewry. And here we were, seventy years later. The old Kalover Rebbe sang that song with a local choir made up of the sweetest looking boys. At the end of this Hungarian song, the Kalover Rebbe and these little cheder boys launched into a soulful rendition of “Yibaneh haMikdash bim’hera b’yamenu” (May the Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days).

It was so moving that even some of the Gentiles present broke into tears. The significance of that site is the pasuk in this week’s parsha: “Remove your shoes from upon your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground.” Here, after everything we experienced, kinderlach are learning Torah in Budapest. That is what the pasuk means “And the bush was not consumed.”

Drasha

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Parshas Shemos

Tough Love

Moshe, the humblest man who was ever on the face of this earth, the man who consistently pleaded with Hashem to spare the Jewish nation from his wrath, emerges this week for the very first time.

First impressions are almost always last impressions, so I wondered what are Moshe’s first actions? Surely they would typify his future distinction.

Open a Chumash and explore the young lad who is found on the Nile, spends his youth in Pharaoh’s palace, and finally “goes out amongst his brothers.” He sees an Egyptian smiting a Jew and then, in a non-speaking role (at least without speaking to any human), he kills him. That is Moshe’s foray in communal activism.

His first words seem diametrically opposed to his ensuing persona. The next day, Moshe “went out and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting.” He immediately chastised the wicked one, “Why would you strike your fellow?” (Exodus 2:13). His admonition provokes an angry response from the quarrelers. “Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me, as you murdered the Egyptian?” (ibid. v. 4). Moshe’s hallmark compassion and concern seems to be overshadowed by his forceful admonition. Is that the first impression the Torah wants us to have of Moshe?

In his youth, Reb Zorach Braverman, who later was known as a brilliant Jerusalem scholar, once travelled from Eishishok to Vilna, Lithuania. Sitting next to him was an elderly Jew with whom he began to converse. Reb Zorach commented to the old man that it was sad that in a city as large as Vilna there was no organized Torah youth group.

The old man became agitated. In a tear-stained voice he responded, “Whom do you expect to organize these groups, “he asked incredulously,” the communal leaders who are destroying Judaism in Vilna? They do nothing to promote Torah values!”

The man went on to condemn a group of parnasim who had assumed control of the community affairs and constantly overruled the Rabbinical authorities in every aspect of communal life as it related to observance of Jewish law. Reb Zorach became incensed. Who was this man to deride a group of community elders? He responded vociferously. “Excuse me,” he interrupted, “but I think you should study the new sefer (book) that was just published. It is called Chofetz Chaim and deals specifically with the laws of slander and gossip. It details all the transgressions listed in the Torah for gossip as such! In fact, I have it here with me.”

The old man asked to see the book. He took it and immediately opened it to a section which specified the rare instance it was a mitzvah to speak out against a group of people, in the case when they act defiantly against rabbinic authority.

Reb Zorach remained quiet and silently took back the book. The trip ended and the old man and Reb Zorach went their ways in Vilna. It only took a day until Reb Zorach found out that he was seated next to none other than the Chofetz Chaim himself.

Of course, Moshe was the compassionate advocate for Klal Yisrael. But the Torah chooses to define his leadership in a clear and unambiguous manner in strong and controversial encounters. His first act was to kill an Egyptian who was smiting a Jew, and his second was to chastise two Jews who were fighting so strongly that they threatened to report his former act to the Egyptian authorities. After the Torah establishes an ability to reprove and even rebuke sin, only then does it tell us of Moshe’s compassion in protecting the daughters of Yisro, in tending sheep by running after a tiny lamb who lost its way in the scorching dessert.

Often I hear quotes, “if Rav Moshe were alive today,” or “if the Chofetz Chaim were alive today,” followed by a notion that these beloved, departed, sages, with their celebrated love and compassion for all Jews, would surely ascribe to unmitigated love and acceptance of anyone’s notion of Judaism as an acceptable alternative.

It's just not true. Great leaders and Torah visionaries do have tremendous love for all Jews, but they do not compromise on Torah law or on Torah values. They are vociferous advocates of right versus wrong. Though one minute they may be chasing lost sheep, running after a small child who dropped a small coin, or translating a letter for an indigent immigrant, they would not hesitate to strike the Egyptian and chastise their fellow Jew who raised his hand against another, physically or spiritually. What truly makes a great man is not only knowing how and when to hold them, but also knowing how and when to scold them.

Dedicated in memory of David Kramer by Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Kramer

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 6 January 2024 / 25 Tevet 5784

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Shemot

Imposter?

"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt?" (3:11)

Everyone deserves to feel confident in who they are, because the fact that you exist testifies to the fact that Hashem created you, and that creation comes from love. If you don't love yourself, Hashem certainly does, or why would he have created you?

But if you've ever questioned your success or found it hard to let go of your mistakes, you're not alone.

An estimated 82% of people struggle with imposter syndrome, and 85% have low self-esteem. Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you're a fraud and don't deserve the things you've achieved. Low self-esteem is a negative self-perception that makes you judge yourself harshly.

While these two conditions have a lot of similarities, they're not identical.

The term "imposter syndrome" comes from the term "imposter phenomenon," which originated with psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978. Clance and Imes used the term to describe high-achieving women who felt fraudulent or inadequate like they had fooled people into believing they were successful.

Nowadays, imposter syndrome is used to describe consistent feelings of self-doubt, even in areas where you've performed well. A few common signs of imposter syndrome are:

Doubting your competence and skills

Negative self-talk

Getting upset when you fail to meet challenging goals

Overachieving or over-preparing

Sabotaging your own hard work

Attributing your success to something other than yourself

If you have imposter syndrome, you might feel like a fraud or tell yourself you don't deserve the things you've achieved. Imposter syndrome can create anxiety that other people will find out you're a fake and that you'll fail to live up to expectations.

Low self-esteem means you judge yourself harshly, think negative thoughts about yourself, and focus more on your flaws than your successes. Unlike imposter syndrome, low self-esteem usually does not make you feel like a fraud, but you may still live in fear of failing or letting others down.

Some signs of low self-esteem include:

Lack of confidence

Thinking or saying negative things about yourself

Ignoring your achievements in favor of focusing on your failures

Sensitivity to criticism

Withdrawing from social activities

Sometimes, low self-esteem can cause or worsen mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

Imposter syndrome and low self-esteem share similar signs, and the conditions can overlap. Having low self-esteem may make you more likely to experience imposter syndrome. Sometimes, having imposter syndrome and the anxiety that comes with it can lower your self-esteem.

A person with imposter syndrome has generally achieved some level of success in an area of their life, yet they struggle to attribute that success to their own ability.

A person with low self-confidence, on the other hand, may be too worried about failing to start working toward their goals in the first place. Low self-confidence generally impacts multiple areas of your life, while imposter syndrome is often limited to specific areas.

"Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt?"

Hashem answered Moshe's two questions in order. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" said Moshe. Hashem told him that he need not fear Pharaoh, because He would be with him. And, as for the merit of the Jewish People, Hashem replied they are destined to receive the Torah on Mount Sinai. They deserved redemption on the basis of their future loyalty to Hashem. This teaches us that we can be judged and even rewarded on the basis of our potential alone.

The fact that Jewish People would, in the future, listen to and obey Hashem, was sufficient to merit their redemption

If Hashem rewards us even for our future achievements, how much more should we not denigrate our past achievements and think we are in some way imposters.

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Office of the Chief Rabbi

4 January 2024

Parshat Shemot: There is a phenomenon associated with the current tragic war, which we must preserve well beyond it.

In Parshat Shemot we are told how Moshe emerged from the palace of Pharaoh in search of his brethren.

What he saw was a tragic scene.

An Egyptian task master was beating an Israelite and would have killed him if not for Moshe's heroic intervention.

On the second day, Moshe again went out and this time he saw Shnei Anashim Ivrim Nitrim, two Hebrews who were fighting against each other.

Again, Moshe intervened, and he said to the protagonist 'Why are you doing this?' and the answer was 'What? Are you going to kill me in the way that you killed the Egyptian yesterday?'

What Moshe saw was a tragic scene which sadly has repeated itself time and again in Jewish history at the very time when, our oppressors from without have threatened us, we have been divided within.

This is what happened in the run up to the fall of Jerusalem in the year 70 when civil war was raging in Jerusalem at the very time when the Romans laid siege to our capital city.

And most recently, prior to the outbreak of war on the 7th of October 2023, there was so much tragic division in Israel which spilled over into the diaspora.

But since the commencement of this war, we are blessed with Jewish unity. In the midst of these dark clouds, it is a precious silver lining.

Let us guarantee that we preserve it well beyond the war.

In our Shabbat service for the Mincha afternoon prayer we say, 'Ata Echad V'Shimcha Echad' 'You God are One and Your name is one'.

'UmiK'Amcha Yisrael Goy Echad B'Aretz' – And who is like Your people Israel? One single united people on earth.

Let us indeed guarantee that we remain a 'Goy Echad', a single united people for all time.

Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

https://torahweb.org/torah/2024/parsha/rlop_shemos.html

Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

Goy Mikerev Goy: Becoming Ourselves

The redemption of the Jewish nation from Egypt is the bedrock of the Jewish faith. The more visible part of the process includes the incredible miracles associated with the redemption; miracles such as the ten plagues and the splitting of the sea, that would never be repeated again in history. These miracles serve as a foundation for the core beliefs of

the Jewish people: i.e Divine providence and Hashem's omnipotence. We therefore understand why these are a core part of the geulah process. But the passuk describing the great and magnificent event of the Jewish people being taken out of Egypt adds another crucial point and states (Devarim 4:34), "Has G-d ever taken out a nation from within a nation through such great and astounding miracles...?" The phrase "a nation from within a nation" is a bit redundant. Obviously, redemption means to be freed from your enslaver, exploiter, etc. Chazal (Midrash Tehillim 107) give us two different analogies illuminating the meaning of "a nation within a nation": 1) R' Avuha says, it is comparable to a calf in the mother's womb, that at the time of birth needs to be eased out. 2) R' Ibo says, it is like a goldsmith extracting the gold from the ore. Both of these descriptions, however, are not really conveying the extraordinary difficulty of the event. There is no mention of how strong and tough the Egyptians were; nor how great a miracle it was. Just what are we adding to the description of the great miracles and wonders when we say, "like a calf from the mother's womb" and "like gold from its ore"?

The Maharal (in Gevuros Hashem) describes another dimension of the geulas Mitzraim: when we think of the miracles associated with taking the Jewish people out of Egypt, we tend to focus on the difficulty of combating the Egyptians, the most powerful nation at that time. But there is a much deeper difficulty in the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt. The Jewish people themselves had been subjugated and acculturated into the Egyptian society for two centuries. Two hundred years of being buried deep in Egyptian society had almost entirely erased any trace of a sense of being Jewish. As the Rambam (Hilchos Avoda Zara 1:3) says, "the roots planted by the Avraham had just about been uprooted". In order to have the process of redemption, there needed first to be an awakening of this sense of being Jewish.

"A nation within a nation" describes that conflicting duality of identity. When a fetus is in its mother's womb, it is in some sense part and parcel of the mother, while in some sense it is its own being. Its identity is a tug of war between these two identities. Therefore, Hashem had to take out "a nation from a nation".

This perspective helps us understand the two examples cited by the midrash - the fetus from the cow, and the gold from the ore. The gold locked into the ore is much harder to extract than the fetus from the mother. It requires breaking the ore to pieces and applying a tremendous amount of heat. But the gold is of an entirely different nature than the stone that it is bonded to, no matter how difficult to process it is to separate it out. On the other hand, the fetus in the mother's womb it is

easier to separate out, but it is inherently of the same flesh and blood as is the mother. It takes a tremendous amount of self-awareness to perceive oneself as being an independent entity despite the fact that the fetus is identical in substance to the mother.

One can now understand the hardship of the Jews' suffering in Egypt, and the process of enslavement and labor imposed on them, as leading to this goal. They needed to come to the painful awareness that they are not, and never will be, Egyptian. The real Egyptians see them as an alien insertion, and even after years of being such productive members of society they were being rejected. In the rejection of the Egyptians, the Jewish people found their own identity. It is almost identical to the birthing process where it is the powerful contraction of the mother that pushes the fetus out, many times unwillingly. Only then can the calf stand on its own feet and begin to realize who it is and what it is.

This is a timeless understanding of the relationship of the Jewish people with the nations that they find refuge in, and in whose societies they become enmeshed. At almost every junction we began to feel at home, and slowly became or tried to become absorbed in the host society. Whether it was Spain or Russia or Germany or any other country that we were hosted by, we slowly began to become integrated, or at least wanted to become integrated. And then inevitably, Hakadosh Boruch Hu arouses powerful forces in our host country, rejecting us.

These rejections are harsh and traumatic, beginning with the psychological aspect of being considered the outsider, to the horrendous sufferings visited upon us by many of these host countries. And it almost always ended in expulsion. As painful as they are they are, these are the forces that shape us as a nation.

Wandering for millennia in other countries, and being as talented and as easily adapting as we are, the danger of becoming absorbed in another culture is great. And once absorbed, we would chas v'shalom lose our own identity, eternally. But Hashem has promised that we will never disappear. Therefore, in gulos after gulos, Hashem begins a process of "goy mikerev goy", extracting "a nation from within a nation". The first step of geulah is to sense that indeed we are a nation apart from our host. Sometimes we are intensely cognizant of it, and sometimes Hashem needs to employ our host remind us that this is so.

Once we come out and recognize ourselves as being unique and an independent entity, the geulah has begun!

לע"ג

שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
בillya bat (ariya) leib u"h
אנא מלכה בת ישראל ע"ה

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'foron has a different explanation. *Paru* (were fruitful) indicates having children, *vayirbu* (multiplied) indicates having many children and *vaya'atz'mu* indicates demographic and physical strength - all positive terms. *Vayish'r'tzu*, however, is a pejorative term. A *sherez* 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'foron 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'foron 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'foro 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'foro 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'foro 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.

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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 Shmot 1:1)

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'bta'rim" /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'hayot Icha 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 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'hatzlachal
menachem

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 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 - may 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: "Io 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 prefacing 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 ot!").

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 & Seforo], 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 'derekh 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 Mitzrayim is that Egypt - the center of ancient civilization - realize that God is above all Man - "ve-yad'u Mitzrayim 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 MAKOT 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 Mitzrayim 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 Seforo's commentary on our pasuk has him adopting this explanation - see footnotes on the Seforo 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. Seforo 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, Seforo 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.