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

Mazel-Tov to the family of Bonnie Handel & Andrew Strauch on the Bar Mitzvah this Shabbat morning of their son, Matthew Strauch, grandson of Ken & Sheila Handel. The Bar Mitzvah will be at Har Shalom in Potomac, MD, where the Handel family have been members for more than 40 years.

LEARNING TO LIVE WITH COVID-19: PANEL DISCUSSION

Bikur Cholim of Greater Washington and several shuls in Silver Spring are presenting a panel of distinguished experts to share latest research and findings on treatment and vaccines. **Saturday, January 23, 2021, 8:15-9:15 p.m.**

Dial-in-number: 1301-715-8592. Zoom Meeting ID: 878 2795 1873. Pass code: 699427.
Speakers:

Ronald Reisler, MD/MPH, infectious diseases, clinical research, Davis Defense Group

Yosefta Hefter, MD, pediatrician, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Fellow at Children's National Hospital

Evan Fisher, MD, internist and Chief Nephrologist, Wright-Patterson AFB; and Assistant Professor, Wright State University Medical School.

Topics include:

- Main signs of COVID-19 and the various tests used to identify and treat it.
- Changes in treatments over the past 10 months and what lies ahead.
- How the virus affects children and how they spread it.
- Latest research findings about early markers of COVID-19 and its after-effects.

Bikur Cholim and shuls invite everyone in the community to listen in by Zoom.

Why does the Torah start a new Sefer at this point, and why is the name of the Sefer Shemot ("Names")? The sefer opens by presenting the names of Yaakov's family members who came with him to Egypt. This presentation seems unnecessary, because the Torah had very recently listed the same information (Bereishis 46:8 ff.). Calling the Sefer "names" also seems a bit trivial, because the subject matter of the Sefer includes Paro's enslaving the Jews, God redeeming us with miracles, our receiving the Law at Har Sinai, chet ha egel, and redemption with the God returning His presence to the Mishkan.

The Torah lists the names of the Yaakov's children (but not the grandchildren, as included in Bereishis 46:8 ff.) We read the names to indicate that the story picks up after everyone in that generation has died. In the rest of the chapter, the Torah does not provide the name of any Jew of that generation. The only ones indicated by name are Shifrah and Puah, the Jewish midwives, identified only by their Egyptian names. By withholding the names of the Jews of that generation, the entire focus in the first two chapters is on Moshe, destined to be the greatest leader in Jewish history.

In Sefer Bereishis, the Torah focuses on individuals and families. In Sefer Shemot, the Torah focuses on B'Nai Yisrael as a nation. Yaakov's family consisted of only seventy adults when they went to Egypt. Within a few generations, however, the family units (tribes) had multiplied so rapidly that it could have been extremely difficult to organize national leaders to represent the Jews before Paro. It was one thing to lead a family of 70 adults. It was vastly different finding a leader to represent 600,000 adult males and their families – millions of people from a dozen different tribes – in bringing concerns to Paro, the most powerful leader of any country in the world. (The thirteen original American colonies had a similar leadership problem before breaking from England in the late 18th Century.)

The transition from a family of a few hundred to millions of Jews came about in only two generations. Levi's son Kohath was Amram's father. Amram's children were Aharon, Miriam, and Moshe. The Torah does not discuss any national leader (as opposed to tribal leaders) before Moshe. If the Jews lacked a recognized national leader, Paro might have had less trouble than otherwise enslaving the Jewish people. During this time of explosive population growth, the vocabulary in the Torah shows that the Egyptians considered the Jews repulsive. The Torah describes the Jews in terms normally used for cockroaches and rats (1:7) and indicates that Paro easily believed that they reproduced and gave birth like animals (1:19).

The explosive population growth may also have caused a problem with religious observance. While the first-born sons had the responsibility of carrying on religious education and practice for each family at this time, there are hints that this process may not have been very successful. For example, when an Egyptian strikes a Jewish man, and when two Jewish men fight, no one complains or tries to stop the violence until Moshe intervenes (2:11-14). Moreover, it apparently takes some time before the Jews pray to God for help. Once they finally start davening, God hears their cries and prepares to intervene (3:23-25).

There is a tradition that shevat Levi was not subject to the harsh slavery of the other tribes. (See article by Menachem Posner below.) This tradition helps explain why Miriam, Aharon, and Moshe all come from shevat Levi. Leadership could not have come from someone who had suffered harsh slavery for many years. The leader would need education and freedom of movement. A leader would also need experience interacting with royalty. Moshe, having grown up as Paro's grandson, living most of his life in the palace, would have this experience. Batya, Paro's daughter, is a heroine in her generation. She saves the baby Jewish boy, raises him in Paro's palace as her son, but educates him to know his heritage and to empathize with "his brother" Jews. According to Midrash, Batya had gone down to the river to convert to Judaism (see Ba'al Haturim 2:5, quoting the Midrash).

Each year, as we turn to Sefer Shemot, I recall wonderful Pesach Seders and Yom Tov services with my beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l. Seders at his table, visits with his family members who spent the holiday with his family, and new insights into the story and traditions always opened new treasures for me and for the rest of my family. Hannah and I tried to pass along these insights to our children, and they enjoyed bringing lessons from their school Rebbes. These are the traditions that we try to bring to our grandsons and enjoy in new ways each year.

Rabbi Yehoshua Singer helped me substantially on this Devar – but I am responsible for not accepting all his suggestions.

Shabbat Shalom,

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

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Nossan ben Pessel, Eli ben Hanina, Yoram HaKohen ben Shoshana, Gedalya ben Sarah, Mordechai ben Chaya, Baruch Yitzhak ben Perl, David Leib HaKohen ben Sheina Reizel, Zev ben Sara Chaya, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, HaRav Dovid Meir ben Chaya Tzippa; Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Amoz ben Tziviah, Reuven ben Masha, Moshe David ben Hannah, Meir ben Sara, Yitzhok Tzvi ben Yehudit Miriam, Yaakov Naphtali ben Michal Leah, Ramesh bat Heshmat, Rivka Chaya bat Leah, Zissel Bat Mazal, Chana Bracha bas Rochel Leah, Leah Fruma bat Musa Devorah, Hinda Behla bat Chaya Leah, Nechama bas Tikva Rachel, Miriam Chava bat Yachid, and Ruth bat Sarah, all of whom greatly need our prayers.

Hannah & Alan

Drasha: Shemos: Burning Interests

by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky © 1996

[Please remember Mordechai ben Chaya for a Mishebarach!]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Good Shabbos!

Shemot: Who (or What) Defines Us As a People?

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

With the opening of the book of Shemot, we transition from Bereshit, the story of the family, to Shemot, the story of the nation. It is a shift in the meaning of "Bnei Yisrael," from "the children of the man named Yisrael (Yaakov)," to "The Nation of Israel (the Israelites)." This can be seen in the opening verses: "וְאֵ לֶּה שׁ ְמוֹת בְּנֵ י יִשְׂרָאֵ ל הַבָּאִ ים מִצְרָ יְמָה אֵ ת יַעֲקֹ ב (Exodus 1:1). These are the children of the man, Israel, who came down with his sons, their wives and their families. Almost immediately after this opening verse, however, the same phrase bnei Yisrael names us as a people, as the Israelites.

It is interesting to note who it is that refers to us in this way. It is Pharaoh. We are first called a nation, a people, by a non-Jew. And not just any non-Jew, but one who is out to destroy us. "הִנֵּ ה עַ ם בְּנֵ י יִשְׂרָאֵ ל רַ ב וְעָצ וּם מִמֶּנּוּ." Behold, the people — the Israelites — are greater than we." (Exodus 1:9) . They might join our enemies; they might wage war upon us. We must enact edicts against them; we must enslave them! These people, these Israelites, are to be feared and hated.

This is a scary thought. It is the idea that our identity is defined from the outside, by oppression and antisemitism.

To some degree, this has historically been the case. We have been othered and hated, and our boundaries have often been defined by our othering. And when, in certain societies and at certain times, there has been more acceptance and

the walls that separate us from those around us have been lowered, then our identity and group cohesion has been challenged. Assimilation and intermarriage are often the cost that comes with the openness and welcome from the outside society.

What's more, even in more open societies, we often choose to continue to define ourselves in terms of our shared oppression. In our contemporary reality, with a wide range among Jews of levels of observance and of theological beliefs or lack thereof, Jewish identity is increasingly hard to pin down. Both individuals and sociologists look to find one characteristic that is present regardless of degree of belief or observance, one characteristic that all Jews share. And for many that is antisemitism, or – more specifically – the shared experience of the Holocaust.

What a depressing way to self-identify. That what makes us an am, a nation, is a shared history – not of our successes and the impact that we have had on the world – but of suffering, attack and attempted genocide. This is the lachrymose view of Jewish history. But who, in the end, wants to be defined by the negativity, opposition, and othering?

A closer look at the Torah reveals that there is more than one term to refer to us as a collective. The term in this week's parsha is "am" which can be translated as "people." The root of this word most likely comes from im, to be with, and its meaning are those who are connected with one another. There is no further defining factor to such a group. Anything can be the basis of their connection.

Later in the Torah we have two other words – one, eidah, shares an entomology with the word moed, and has a meaning of those who have come together at an appointed time. An eidah is people who have gathered together. It enjoys a deeper degree of cohesion than an am. Yet, in the end, there is something ad hoc about this gathering; it is often spontaneous, without planning or a clear sense of goals. There is no enduring identity to an eidah.

The third word, kehilah, congregation, means something different altogether. Lehakel is to gather with intentionality and for a purpose. People do not congregate by accident. Kehilah is the key word used in the Torah in Devarim, regarding standing at Har Sinai (Deuteronomy 4:10): "הַקְהֶל לִי אֶת הָעָם – Gather the people to me." This is the day of standing at Har Sinai is actually called (Deuteronomy 10:4) "יום הַקָּהָל – the day of gathering." And this is re-lived every seven years in the mitzvah of Hakhel – a gathering of the people to reenact the receiving of the Torah at Har Sinai.

Kehilah is a sense of identity that endures. Rav Soloveitchik distinguishes an identity of shared fate ("am hagoral") to one of shared destiny and mission ("am hayiud"). In our terms, what Rav Soloveitchik is saying is that we are not just an am, we are also a kehilah. There is a reason why synagogues are called "Kehila Kedosha" We see ourselves as members of a community defined by a common purpose, a shared understanding of what it means to be a Jew in the world.

This is the challenge that faces us. Will we choose to be defined, by ourselves or by others, by boundary issues? To define ourselves in terms of who is against us and whom we oppose? Are we to invest our energies into monitoring and guarding those boundaries and in elevating the self-appointed guardians who choose to do so? To do so is to settle on us as an am, as a people defined by the Pharaohs of the world, as a group that chooses to characterize itself in terms of its opposition to and by outside forces.

There is another way — the kehilah way. It is to ask ourselves not whom are we against, but what are we for? Why are we gathered? What is our purpose and what are our commitments? What are our values, and what are we to accomplish in the larger world?

My brakhah to all of us is that we move, not just from being individuals in Bereshit to being a people in Shemot, but also from the beginning of Shemot to its climax in the story of Yitro. From being defined by Pharaoh to the gathering at Har Sinai, to living lives of purpose and mission, lives of Torah and Mitzvot in the service of the people and in the service of God.

Shabbat Shalom!

Shimos: Everyone Counts!

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine* © 2021 Teach 613

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With heartfelt blessings for a wonderful Shabbos,

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Retaining our Humanity: Thoughts on Parashat Shemot

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel*

"And he turned this way and that way, and saw that there was no man."

When Moses saw an Egyptian taskmaster beating an Israelite slave, he looked around before striking the Egyptian down. This passage is usually understood to mean that he wanted to be sure that he would not be seen when he slew the Egyptian.

The passage might be understood in a different way. Moses was outraged by the entire system of slavery. He saw one group of people oppressing another group of people, treating the slaves as chattel rather than as fellow human beings. By dehumanizing the Israelites, the Egyptians felt no remorse in beating them, forcing them to do backbreaking work, condemning their children to death. The taskmasters had lost their humanity.The abusive treatment of slaves exacted a psychological as well as physical price; the slaves came to see themselves as inferiors to their masters; they lost self-respect along with their freedom.

When Moses was confronted with a specific instance of an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, he realized that "there was no man"--the oppressor had become a savage beast, the oppressed had become a work animal. The human element had vanished; there was no mercy, no mutual respect, no sympathy for each other. It was this recognition that was more than Moses could bear. He rashly killed the Egyptian--which did not solve the problem at all. He was then compelled to flee for his own life. He stayed for many years in the tranquility of Midian, working as a lonely shepherd. He could not deal with the injustices taking place in Egypt--a land where 'there was no man', a land where people had been reduced to animal status, to objects rather than subjects. [emphasis added]

The Torah's story of the redemption of the Israelite slaves is ultimately a profound lesson teaching that each human being has a right to be free, to be a dignified human being, to be treated (and to treat others) as a fellow human being. Slavery is an evil both for the oppressor and the oppressed. It is a violation of the sanctity of human life.

Dehumanization of others leads not just to disdain, or even to slavery; it leads to violence and murder. Dehumanization is how terrorists justify murder: they see their victims as inferior beings, as infidels--not as fellow human beings created in the image of God. Dehumanization results in discrimination against those who are perceived to be "the other"--people of different ethnicity, religion, race, beliefs.

We know our society is in trouble when members of one group feel themselves innately superior to people of another group, and engage in stereotyping and dehumanizing them. We know that there is moral decay within the Jewish people, when Jews of one background feel themselves superior to Jews of another background, when they exhibit discriminatory behavior and language, when they dehumanize their fellow Jews and fellow human beings.

When human beings treat each other as objects, humanity suffers. When human beings see their kinship with other human beings and treat each other with respect, humanity begins its process of redemption. We can retain our own humanity only when we recognize the humanity of each of our fellow human beings.

* Jewishideas.org. https://www.jewishideas.org/retaining-our-humanitythoughts-parashat-shemot **The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals has experienced a significant drop in donations during the pandemic. The Institute needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Instutite for Jewish Ideas and Ideals at this time**.

Crowd Instinct, Personality Instinct: Blog by Rabbi Marc D. Angel

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his memoir, The Torch in My Ear, the Sephardic Jewish writer Elias Canetti (who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981) reflects on an insight that came to him as a young man: “I realized that there is such a thing as a crowd instinct, which is always in conflict with the personality instinct, and that the struggle between the two of them can explain the course of human history.” (The Memoirs of Elias Canetti, p. 387).This idea became central to Canetti’s life, ultimately resulting in his classic book Crowds and Power.

What is the “crowd instinct?” It is the desire to blend into a crowd, to dissolve one’s personality into a large mass of people. The crowd instinct can be witnessed in sports’ arenas, where fans become one with each other and with the players on the field. It can be experienced in mass rallies where fiery orators fire up the crowd, or at rock concerts where fans lose themselves in their wild admiration of the singers and their music. People have a deep desire to be part of such crowds.

Yet, crowds can become dangerous. When individuals succumb to crowds, demagogues can control them, can drive them to do terrible things, can turn them into lynch mobs or murderous gangs, can push them into terrorism and war.

And so there is also a “personality instinct,” a deep desire to retain our own ideas and values, to resist the mesmerizing power of crowds. Although we at times want to share in the enthusiasms and griefs of crowds, we simultaneously want to maintain our inner freedom from the crowds. We want to blend in…but not to blend in.

In the Almighty’s blessing of Abraham, we can detect both the crowd instinct and the personality instinct. God apparently wanted Abraham to keep aware of these conflicting pulls, and to maintain spiritual balance.

God promised that He would multiply Abraham’s seed “as the stars of the heaven.” Stars, although there are so many of them, are essentially alone…light years separate one star from the next. Stars symbolize the personality instinct, the unique separateness of each one. Although part of a galaxy, each star is separate and distinct, never losing its particular identity.

But God also promised that Abraham’s seed would be “as the sand which is upon the seas-shore.” Sand represents an entirely different kind of multitude than stars. While each star is alone and separate, each grain of sand is surrounded by many other grains of sand. Whereas stars evoke separateness, sand evokes incredible closeness…masses of grains touching each other so that it is almost impossible to take only one grain of sand in your hand. Sand symbolizes the crowd instinct.

Abraham was to found a new nation, and nations need to have adequate numbers in order to thrive. Nation-building entails working with crowds, striving to create consensus among various factions. Nations demand patriotism, national symbols that inspire citizens to feel united with each other. But nations can become dangerous crowds. Demagogues can manipulate the crowd’s emotions and can control information that they share with the masses. Crowds can become dangerous; crowds can be turned into murdering, war-mongering and hateful entities.

How can one resist the power of crowds? For this we need the personality instinct. Each person needs to understand the crowd, but keep enough independence not to totally succumb to the power of the crowd. Each person literally has to be a hero, has to be willing to stand up and stand out…and possibly take terrible risks in order to maintain personal integrity.

This was God's blessing to Abraham: Your seed will learn how to form positive, helpful, cooperative crowds that will enhance human civilization. Your seed will be composed of individuals who will have the wisdom and the courage to remain separate, to resist those who would try to manipulate the crowd into wickedness. Your seed—like the stars—will be composed of strong, luminous and separate beings. Your seed—like the sand—will come together to form healthy, strong and moral communities and societies.

Throughout human history, there has been an ongoing tension between the crowd instinct and the personality instinct. Too often, the crowd instinct has prevailed. Masses of people have been whipped up to commit the worst atrocities, to murder innocents, to vent hatred. Too seldom have the masses acted like stars who can and do resist the power of dangerous crowds.

In our time, like throughout history, there are those who seek to manipulate crowds in dangerous, murderous and hateful ways. There are those who play on the fears and gullibility of the masses, who dissolve individuality and turn people into frenzied sheep.

But there are also those who refuse to become part of such crowds, who resist the crowd instinct and maintain the personality instinct. These are the stars who will form a new kind of crowd, a crowd that will bring human beings together in harmony and mutual respect. God's blessing to Abraham is a blessing that we all need to internalize…the sooner the better.

***** Jewishideas.org. https://www.jewishideas.org/blog/crowd-instinct-personality-instinct-blog-rabbi-marc-d-angel NOTE: Rabbi Angel wrote and published this blog three days before the march on Congress once again illustrated the dangers of crowd instinct.

Parshas Shemos – Not As Small As It Seems

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

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

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

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

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

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

There are many varied issues we deal with in our current, complex world. These issues, be they matters of medicine, of religion, of politics or ethics and morals, are all extremely significant, and we rightfully feel strongly about the importance of these issues. Every one of these issues touches on an endless variety of important nuances and sensitivities in our own personality and in our dealings with other people. If we let ourselves get caught up in the emotions, so often we trample on these sensitivities. When we do so, we set ourselves on a course to become someone we never wanted to be.
We must tread carefully when discussing or acting upon issues with far-reaching implications. No matter how important the issue, the side issues cannot be forgotten. If we trample upon those sensitivities, we risk losing integral parts of who we are. Those seemingly small decisions have a real impact on our psyche.

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Dvar Torah for Shemot: Freethinking and Creative Thinking

by Rabbi Moshe Rube*

> *"And there they became a nation – this teaches that the Israelites were distinct there, in that their clothing, food, and language was different from the Egyptians'. They were identified and known as a separate nation, apart from the Egyptians."* - Rabbinic Midrash

Would you be offended or honored to be known as a freethinker?

Obviously, intentions matter when someone gives you a label, so I ask here only as far as the abstract concept. Do you think freethinking is something to strut about?

For me, not really. At least not on its own as to be a free thinker doesn't require you to think at all. All you need to do is to show that you do not think a certain way. On its own, it's actually a celebration of not thinking.

Like creating a crater to lay a new foundation, free thought creates a space for new ideas. Butt making craters everywhere only spreads misery. I'd much rather be known as a creative thinker or a visionary thinker. Someone who can build a new idea on a strong basis on all the fields that make us human (spirituality science, creativity etc.) rather than someone who only takes pleasure in not thinking along certain lines. If I ever dye my hair red, I hope it will be because of a strong positive reason like Purim, or supporting the Tide.

I have heard the Midrash above quoted my entire life often to drive home the conclusion that to be distinct must be a top priority for the Jews. By following the logic of the Midrash, the most important thing about being Jewish would be celebrating gefilte fish, throwing in a bisele Yiddish every now and then, and wearing our JCC Maccabi t-shirts (which I still have from three years ago).

But aren't all of these qualities exclusively of freethought rather than visionary thought? It's easy to just not be Egyptian but what about being known for your unique take on approaching life, or groundbreaking accomplishments in fields of the mind and heart? I love Jewish food as much as anyone. But I would never have the same feeling of pride to be apart of this nation if that's the only thing we were known for

But let's all remember that this Midrash comments on a verse before the Jews were enslaved. This popular teaching depicts the state of the Jews before we went through this terrible experience together and gained the gift of our shared Torah vision at Sinai. We progressed from a nation of not just freethinkers but to visionaries.

It's impossible to be a creative thinker without being a free thinker. But let's not settle for just being a free thinker. After all, no one joins a Jewish community only to get a bisele deli.

Shabbat Shalom!

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Rav Kook Torah
Shemot: The Leadership of Moses

When God informed Moses that he was to bring the Jewish people out of Egypt, Moses did not accept the assignment happily. "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Ex. 3:11)

What was Moses' objection? The Midrash explains with the following parable:

> *"A king once married off his daughter, and he promised to employ a lady to wait on her. However, the king only provided the daughter with a lowly maidservant. His son-in-law complained, 'Did you not promise to hire a lady to serve her?'*
>
> *This is what Moses said to God: Master of the universe! When Jacob went down to Egypt, did You not say to him, "I will go down with you to Egypt and I will surely take you out"? But now You say, "I am sending you to Pharaoh"!"* (Shemot Rabbah 3:4)

According to the Midrash, Moses objected to leading the Israelites because he felt that God had promised to do the job Himself. Did Moses really think that God would lead them out of Egypt without a human emissary?

Also, we need to examine God's response to Moses:

> *"I will be with you. This will be your sign that I have sent you: when you bring the people out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain."* (Ex. 3:12)

How does serving God on Mount Sinai prove that God Himself will lead the people? How did it allay Moses' fears about his mission?

Two Types of Leaders

In general, we may distinguish between two types of successful leaders. The first category are leaders who excel in organizational skills. The leader himself does not contribute or add to the nation's accomplishments, but he knows how to bring together the various abilities and talents dispersed amongst the people. By marshalling together their diverse strengths, such a leader gently steers the people to their destiny.

The second type of leader is more than just an efficient organizer. He uses his own special gifts to inspire the people to greater aspirations. Such a leader is not merely an instrument of heaven to rule the people; he is a dynamic individual, blessed with extraordinary wisdom and holiness, capable of uplifting the people to a level that they could not reach on the basis of their own merits.

These two types of leaders induce change in different ways. The competent leader gradually leads his people to their national goals, step-by-step. The charismatic leader, on the other hand, inspires the people to attain new heights in a sudden and dramatic fashion.

Moses' Complaint

This distinction allows us to understand Moses' objection. Moses probably recognized that he was destined to lead the Jewish people. His miraculous rescue as a baby and his extraordinary childhood growing up in Pharaoh's palace indicated that Moses was meant to lead his people.

In his humility, however, Moses placed himself in the first category of leaders — those without any special qualities of their own, just the willingness to organize and govern the people. God, however, had promised a dramatic redemption, a quantum leap in the people's spiritual elevation, when He said "I will surely raise up" (Gen. 46:4). Clearly, God had intended that a charismatic leader would inspire and ennoble the people.

Like the son-in-law in the parable, Moses objected to God's choice of leader. The King had promised a lady of high caliber — a great and inspiring leader. But He had only provided a lowly maid-servant - Moses, a competent but unremarkable public servant.

Therefore, God explained to Moses, "I will be with you." With the sublime powers that I bestow upon you, you will be able to uplift the people to a level beyond their current reach. In this way, I will fulfill My promise to them.

And God continued: the proof that you will be the catalyst for profound change is that the people will stand on Mount Sinai. In order to merit receiving the Torah, the Jewish people will need to be on the highest spiritual level. If that was not the case, the Torah could have been revealed to an earlier generation.

The fact that the Jewish people would stand at Mount Sinai was proof that Moses would in fact be the second type of leader, dramatically readying them for this historic moment.

Ready for the Priesthood and the Kingship

This explanation helps us understand a difficult Midrash. When God first revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush, Moses responded, 'Hineini' — "Here I am." Or perhaps, "I am ready."

The Midrash explains that Moses was saying, "I am ready for the priesthood and the kingship." These aspirations, however, were not to be. The priesthood had already been designated to Aaron, and the kingship to David. Nevertheless, Moses temporarily merited both of these high positions. He served as High Priest during the seven days of installment of the priests, and ruled as king during his lifetime (Shemot Rabbah 2:6).

How can we resolve this Midrash — practically a demand for prestige and power — with the self-effacing humility so apparent in the Torah's depiction of Moses?

Furthermore, the Sages taught that "When God bestows greatness on an individual, He gives it to him and his descendants for all generations" (Megillah 13b). Why did Moses only merit these positions temporarily, for himself and not for his descendants?

As we explained earlier, Moses considered himself a suitable candidate to govern the Jewish people. His refusal to bring the Israelites out of Egypt stemmed from his assessment that he was not the great leader who could fulfill God's promise to uplift the nation. As a competent leader, however, Moses felt that he was a suitable candidate to initiate a dynasty of kings or high priests, and thus gradually elevate the people over the generations.

In fact, Moses was the revolutionary leader who wrought radical change on the Jewish people. Accordingly, his dynamic leadership was short and dramatic, lasting only during his lifetime.

(Adapted from Midbar Shur, pp. 281-289.)

http://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHMOT_65.htm

God Loves Those Who Argue (Shemot 5778))

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

I have become increasingly concerned about the assault on free speech taking place throughout the West, particularly in university campuses.[1] This is being done in the name of "safe space," that is, space in which you are protected against hearing views which might cause you distress, "trigger warnings"[2] and "micro-aggressions," that is, any remark that someone might find offensive even if no offence is meant.

So far has this gone that at the beginning of the 2017 academic year, students at an Oxford College banned the presence of a representative of the Christian Union on the grounds that some might find their presence alienating and offensive.[3] Increasingly, speakers with controversial views are being disinvited: the number of such incidents on American college campuses rose from 6 in 2000 to 44 in 2016.[4]

Undoubtedly this entire movement was undertaken for the highest of motives, to protect the feelings of the vulnerable. That is a legitimate ethical concern. Jewish law goes to extremes in condemning lashon hara, hurtful or derogatory speech, and the sages were careful to use what they called lashon sagi nahor, euphemism, to avoid language that people might find offensive.

But a safe space is not one in which you silence dissenting views. To the contrary: it is one in which you give a respectful hearing to views opposed to your own, knowing that your views too will be listened to respectfully. That is academic freedom, and it is essential to a free society.[5] As George Orwell said, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

John Stuart Mill likewise wrote that one of the worst offences against freedom is "to stigmatise those who hold the contrary opinion as bad and immoral men." That is happening today in institutions that are supposed to be the guardians of academic freedom. We are coming perilously close to what Julian Benda called, in 1927, "The treason of the intellectuals," in which he said that academic life had been degraded to the extent that it had allowed itself to become an arena for "the intellectual organisation of political hatreds."[6]

What is striking about Judaism, and we see this starkly in this week's parsha, is that argument and the hearing of contrary views is of the essence of the religious life. Moses argues with God. That is one of the most striking things about him. He argues with Him on their first encounter at the burning bush. Four times he resists God's call to lead the Israelites to freedom, until God finally gets angry with him (Ex. 3:1–4:7). More significantly, at the end of the parsha he says to God:

> *"Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all."* (Ex. 5:22-23).

This is extraordinary language for a human being to use to God. But Moses was not the first to do so. The first was Abraham, who said, on hearing of God's plan to destroy the cities of the plain, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25).

Similarly, Jeremiah, posing the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people, asked: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). In the same vein, Habakkuk challenged God: "Why do You tolerate the treacherous? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 1:13). Job who challenges God's justice is vindicated in the book that bears his name, while his friends who defended Divine justice are said not to have spoken correctly (Job 42:7-8). Heaven, in short, is not a safe space in the current meaning of the phrase. To the contrary: God loves those who argue with Him – so it seems from Tanakh.

Equally striking is the fact that the sages continued the tradition and gave it a name: argument for the sake of heaven,[7] defined as debate for the sake of truth as opposed to victory.[8] The result is that Judaism is, perhaps uniquely, a civilisation all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of arguments. Midrash operates on the principle that there are "seventy faces" to Torah and thus that every verse is open to multiple interpretations. The Mishnah is full of

paragraphs of the form, “Rabbi X says this while Rabbi Y says that.” The Talmud says in the name of God himself, about the conflicting views of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, that “These and those are the words of the living God.”[9]

A standard edition of Mikraot Gedolot consists of the biblical text surrounded by multiple commentaries and even commentaries on the commentaries. The standard edition of the Babylonian Talmud has the text surrounded by the often conflicting views of Rashi and the Tosafists. Moses Maimonides, writing his masterpiece of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, took the almost unprecedented step of presenting only the halakhic conclusion without the accompanying arguments. The ironic but predictable result was that the Mishneh Torah was eventually surrounded by an endless array of commentaries and arguments. In Judaism there is something holy about argument.

Why so? First, because **only God can see the totality of truth**. For us, mere mortals who can see only fragments of the truth at any one time, there is an irreducible multiplicity of perspectives. We see reality now one way, now another. The Torah provides us with a dramatic example in its first two chapters, which give us two creation accounts, both true, from different vantage points. The different voices of priest and prophet, Hillel and Shammai, philosopher and mystic, historian and poet, each capture something essential about the spiritual life. Even within a single genre, the sages noted that “No two prophets prophesy in the same style.”[10] Torah is a conversation scored for many voices.

Second, because justice presupposes the principle that in Roman law is called audi alteram partem, “hear the other side.” That is why God wants an Abraham, a Moses, a Jeremiah and a Job to challenge Him, sometimes to plead for mercy or, as in the case of Moses at the end of this week’s parsha, to urge Him to act swiftly in defence of His people.[11] Both the case for the prosecution and the defence must be heard if justice is to be done and seen to be done.

The pursuit of truth and justice require the freedom to disagree. The Netziv argued that it was the prohibition of disagreement that was the sin of the builders of Babel.[12] What we need, therefore, is not “safe spaces” but rather, civility, that is to say, giving a respectful hearing to views with which we disagree. In one of its loveliest passages the Talmud tells us that the views of the school of Hillel became law “because they were pleasant and did not take offence, and because they taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, indeed they taught the views of their opponents before their own.”[13]

And where do we learn this from? From God Himself, who chose as His prophets people who were prepared to argue with Heaven for the sake of Heaven in the name of justice and truth.

When you learn to listen to views different from your own, realising that they are not threatening but enlarging, then you have discovered the life-changing idea of argument for the sake of heaven.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] I first wrote about this ten years ago in my book, The Home We Build Together (2007), in the chapter entitled “The Defeat of Freedom in the Name of Freedom,” 37-48. The situation has become significantly worse since then.

[2] See on this, Mick Hume, Trigger Warning: Is the Fear of Being Offensive Killing Free Speech? London, William Collins, 2016.

[3] See http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2017/10/10/oxford-college-bans-harmful-christian-union-freshers-fair.

[4] Jean M. Twenge, iGen, Atria, 2017, 253.

[5] I salute the University of Chicago, Princeton and other universities, that have taken a strong stand in defence of free speech on campus; and Professor Jonathan Haidt and his colleagues at the Heterodox Academy, founded to promote intellectual diversity in academic life.

[6] Julian Benda, The Treason of the Intellectuals, Transaction, 2007, 27.

[7] Mishnah, Avot 5:17.

[8] Meiri to Avot ad loc.

[9] Eruvin 13b.

[10] Sanhedrin 89a.

[11] See Pesachim 87a-b for a remarkable passage in which God criticises the prophet Hosea for not coming to the defence of his people.

[12] Ha'amek Davar to Gen. 11:4.

[13] Eruvin 13b.

* Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Dvar. *See* https://rabbisacks.org/god-loves-argue-shemot-5778/ Note: emphasis (boldface) added.

The Cyclical Exodus: An Essay on Parshat Shemot

By Adin Even-Israel (Steinsaltz) *****

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

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

The Exodus from Egypt

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The meaning of exile

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

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

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

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

Individual or collective?

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

It appears that the oppression of the Egyptian exile begins only when Pharaoh says to his people, "Behold, the People of Israel are too numerous and strong for us."3 The beginning of the Egyptian exile hinges on the Egyptians' perception that

Israel is a foreign nation—they sense Israel's foreignness. As long as this awareness is lacking, and the Egyptians relate to the People of Israel as individuals, this is not yet exile; the People of Israel are merely strangers.

Exile hinges on whether the person is part of a collective or a separate individual. When individuals, even a large number of them, are in another country, they may be considered foreigners, strangers in a strange land; but when there is a whole collective, an entire nation, in a place that is inappropriate for it—that is exile. For this reason, one of the ways in which Diaspora Jews often seek to solve the problem of exile is by attempting to ignore their collective identity. They want their countrymen to relate to them as to individuals, not as parts of a whole. They avow that they are Jewish only by chance, just as a Turk happens to have been born in Turkey and an Italian happens to have been born in Italy—they do not belong to the Jewish collective. Once these individuals remove themselves from the collective, then although they are not in their true homeland, and they are different in many ways from their non-Jewish neighbors, this is an individualized problem and not one of exile.

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

Awareness of exile and redemption

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOTNOTES:

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

2. Gen. 15:13.

3. Ex. 1:9.

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

The Raised Hand: Pearls of Rashi on the Torah Portion of Shemot

By Shmuel Mendelsohn *

This week's Torah portion, Shemot, is the beginning of the second book of the Torah. It begins by describing the slavery which our forefathers endured in the land of Egypt. The Parshah goes on to tell us of the birth of Moses, who would lead us from our Egyptian exile.

Through a series of miracles, Moshe grew up in Pharaoh's palace. When Moses was older, he went out to see what was going on with his fellow Jews. The Torah tells us that, "He went out on the second day, and behold, two Jews were quarreling. Moshe said to the wicked one, 'Why will you strike your friend?'"1

The Torah calls one of the men wicked. Why was he considered evil? Because he will (in the future tense) strike his friend. Why should he be considered sinful now? He did not yet hit anyone; he merely raised his hand!

Rashi cites the words from the verse, "Why will you strike," to answer this question. He writes that "Although he had not [yet] hit him, he was called wicked for raising his hand [to strike him]."2

Rashi does not explain why one is considered evil for merely raising his hand to strike his fellow. He is only telling us that in this case the person is considered wicked.

Why was the person deemed wicked? Hashem created each of us "to serve our Creator." 3 From this, we understand that Hashem created each limb and every organ of the body to help fulfill this goal.

For example, Hashem created a hand to give to another, i.e., "a hand which distributes tzedakah."4 However, if a person does not use his or her hand to benefit one's fellow; to the contrary, by using it to strike one's fellow, the person is sinning. The person misappropriates one's hand, i.e., misusing it.

In other words, the very act of lifting one's hand, although the person did not yet hit anyone, contradicts the very purpose for which Hashem created the hand. Therefore, the sin against Hashem begins with the act of lifting one's hand.

Let us all make sure to learn from this week's Parshah. We must use every fiber of our being to provide goodness and kindness to all of those with whom we come into contact. Then we will be sure to bring Moshiach now!

Adapted from Likkutei Sichot, Volume 31, Page 5

FOOTNOTES:

1. Shemot 2:13.

2. Sanhedrin 58b.

3. See the Mishnah and Beraita at the end of Tractate Kiddushin.

4. See Tanya, Chapter 23.

* Mashpia of Yeshiva Torah Ohr in North Miami Beach, FL © Chabad 2021..

Why didn't Pharaoh enslave the tribe of Levi?

By Menachem Posner *

Scripture never states explicitly that the tribe of Levi was not enslaved. In Midrash Tanchuma,1 however, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi makes this assertion.

Rashi 2 sees it as implicit from the fact that Aaron was able to go and greet Moses, and they were both allowed to come and go as they please—and even meet Pharaoh. How would they be roaming so freely if their tribe was bound in labor? Rather, since the Tribe of Levi was a priestly class, even in Egypt, the Egyptians allowed them complete freedom.

Even back then, the tribe of Levi served as the spiritual compass of the Jewish people. There are a number of explanations of how this saved them from enslavement. Here are some:

> A. Pharaoh was aware of the fact that he would one day be punished for enslaving the Jewish people. He hoped that by allowing the tribe of Levi to continue to study G d's teachings and serve Him, he would be spared from retribution.3
>
> B. Even Pharaoh understood the need for every nation to have spiritual leaders and guides and therefore kept the tribe of Levi as the guardians of the tradition.4
>
> C. Jacob had told his children that the tribe of Levi would one day merit to carry the Ark of the Covenant—and the rest of the traveling Tabernacle—in the desert. At first, when Pharaoh began inducing the people to work, the people came as volunteers. Only later did the work become mandatory. The Levites were aware of their special purpose and felt that shoulders reserved for the Ark of G d should not carry Pharaoh's bricks. Since they never began working for Pharaoh even in the volunteer stage, they were not subjected to the subsequent slavery.5

FOOTNOTES:

1. Va'erah 6.

2. Exodus 5:4.

3. Gur Aryeh, Exodus 5:4.

4. Rabenu Bachya, Nachmanides, Exodus 5:4.

5. Cited in Chizkuni and Daas Zekeinim on Exodus 5:4.

* Staff editor at Chabad.org. https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/811168/jewish/Why-didnt-Pharaoh-enslave-the-tribe-of-Levi.htm

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Shemot: How Did the Egyptians Demoralize their Jewish Slaves?

An Insight from the Lubavitcher Rebbe *

The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites with backbreaking, i.e., demoralizing and unusual labor. (Exodus 1:13)

When the Egyptians saw that conscripting the Jews to build storage cities did not succeed in checking their birthrate, they added mental demoralization to the hard work in order to break their spirits, correctly believing that this would weaken them physically, as well:

First, they made the men do women's work and the women do men's work. The change in routine was unusual and unsettling, and both the men and the women found themselves ill suited to each other's jobs: the women were not strong enough to do the men's work, and even though women's work requires less raw strength than men's work, the endurance it requires was more than the men were capable of.

Second, instead of having them build storage cities, they made them do work without purpose, simply for the sake of afflicting them. This was particularly demoralizing, for even if a person is forced to work hard, he can at least pride himself on having done the job well if there is a specific objective. But if there is no objective and the work has no end, it is both physically and mentally backbreaking.

This is the meaning of backbreaking, *demoralizing and unusual labor*.

— From the Kehot Chumash*

* An excerpt from the Kehot Chumash, with an insight by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z"l, of righteous memory.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
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Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Women as Leaders

This week's parsha could be entitled "The Birth of a Leader." We see Moses, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, growing up as a prince of Egypt. We see him as a young man, for the first time realising the implications of his true identity. He is, and knows he is, a member of an enslaved and suffering people: "Growing up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people" (Ex. 2:10).

He intervenes – he acts: the mark of a true leader. We see him intervene three times, twice in Egypt, once in Midian, to rescue victims of violence. We then witness the great scene at the Burning Bush where God summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until God becomes angry and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the genesis of a hero.

But this is only the surface tale. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another far more remarkable story, not about a hero but about six heroines, six courageous women without whom there would not have been a Moses.

First is Yocheved, wife of Amram and mother of the three people who were to become the great leaders of the Israelites: Miriam, Aaron and Moses himself. It was Yocheved who, at the height of Egyptian persecution, had the courage to have a child, hide him for three months, and then devise a plan to give him a chance of being rescued. We know all too little of Yocheved. In her first appearance in the Torah she is unnamed. Yet, reading the narrative, we are left in no doubt about her bravery and resourcefulness. Not by accident did her children all become leaders.

The second was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter and Moses' elder sister. It was she who kept watch over the child as the small ark floated down the river, and it was she who approached Pharaoh's daughter with the suggestion that he be nursed among his own people. The biblical text paints a portrait of the young Miriam as a figure of unusual fearlessness and presence of mind. Rabbinic tradition goes further. In a remarkable Midrash, we read of how, upon hearing of the decree that every male Israelite baby would be drowned in the river, Amram led the Israelites in divorcing their wives so that there would be no more children. He had logic on his side. Could it be right to bring children into the world if there were a fifty per cent chance that they would be killed at birth? Yet his young daughter Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him and persuaded him to change his mind. "Your decree," she said, "is worse than Pharaoh's. His affects only the boys; yours affects all. His deprives children of life in this world; yours will deprive them of life even in the World to Come." Amram relented, and as a result, Moses was born.[1] The implication is clear: Miriam had more faith than her father.

Third and fourth were the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who frustrated Pharaoh's first attempt at genocide. Ordered to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17). Summoned and accused of disobedience, they outwitted Pharaoh by constructing an ingenious cover story: the Hebrew women, they said, are vigorous and give birth before we arrive. They escaped punishment and saved many lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilisation: the idea that there are moral limits to power. There are instructions that should not be obeyed. There are crimes against humanity that cannot be excused by the claim that "I was only obeying orders." This concept, generally known as "civil disobedience", is usually attributed to the nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau, and entered international consciousness after the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. Its true origin, though, lies thousands of years earlier in the actions of two women, Shifra and Puah. Through their understated courage they earned a high place among the moral heroes of history, teaching us the primacy of conscience over conformity, the law of justice over the law of the land.[2]

The fifth is Tzipporah, Moses' wife. The daughter of a Midianite priest, she was nonetheless determined to accompany Moses on his mission to Egypt, despite the fact that she had no reason to risk her life on such a hazardous venture. In a deeply enigmatic passage, we see it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4:24-26). The impression we gain of her is a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, had a better sense than Moses himself of what God requires.

I have saved until last the most intriguing of them all: Pharaoh's daughter. It was she who had the courage to rescue an Israelite child and bring him up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people. Could we imagine a daughter of Hitler, or Eichmann, or Stalin, doing the same? There is something at once heroic and gracious about this lightly sketched figure, the woman who gave Moses his name.

Who was she? The Torah does not mention her name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4:18) references a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she whom 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."[3]

They added that she was one of the few people (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.[4]

So, on the surface, the parsha of Shemot is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women without whom there would not have been a Moses. They belong to a long tradition of strong women throughout Jewish history, from Deborah, Hannah, Ruth and Esther in the Bible to more modern religious figures like Sarah Schenirer and Nechama Leibowitz to more secular figures like Anne Frank, Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir.

How then, if women emerge so powerfully as leaders, were they excluded in Jewish law from certain leadership roles? If we look carefully we will see that women were historically excluded from two areas. One was the "crown of priesthood", which went to

Aaron and his sons. The other was the "crown of kingship", which went to David and his sons. These were two roles built on the principle of dynastic succession. From the third crown – the "crown of Torah" – however, women were not excluded. There were Prophetesses, not just Prophets. The Sages enumerated seven of them (Megillah 14a). There have been great women Torah scholars always, from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) until today.

At stake is a more general distinction. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in his Responsa, Binyan Av, differentiates between formal or official authority (samchut) and actual leadership (hanhagah).[5] There are figures who hold positions of authority – prime ministers, presidents, CEOs – who may not be leaders at all. They may have the power to force people to do what they say, but they have no followers. They excite no admiration. They inspire no emulation. And there may be leaders who hold no official position at all but who are turned to for advice and are held up as role models. They have no power but great influence. Israel's Prophets belonged to this category. So, often, did the gedolei Yisrael, the great Sages of each generation. Neither Rashi nor Rambam held any official position (some scholars say that Rambam was chief rabbi of Egypt but most hold that he was not, though his descendants were). Wherever leadership depends on personal qualities – what Max Weber called "charismatic authority" – and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men.

Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Tzipporah and Batya were leaders not because of any official position they held (in the case of Batya she was a leader despite her official title as a princess of Egypt). They were leaders because they had courage and conscience. They refused to be intimidated by power or defeated by circumstance. They were the real heroes of the Exodus. Their courage is still a source of inspiration today.

[1] Shemot Rabbah 1:13.
[2] There is, of course, a Midrashic tradition that Shifra and Puah were other names for Yocheved and Miriam (Sotah 11b). In seeing them as separate women, I am following the interpretation given by Abarbanel and Luzzatto.
[3] Vayikra Rabbah 1:3.
[4] Derech Eretz Zuta 1
[5] Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, 2nd edn., no. 65.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

The Book of Exodus begins the story of the people of Israel, the nation that developed from the household, or the family, of Jacob. Many are the differences between the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus, but perhaps the greatest change lies in the "personality" (as it were) of God Himself.

Genesis, the book of creation, refers to God at first as Elohim, the sum total of all the powers of the Universe, who created the heavens, the earth and all of their accoutrements. And this God of the creation, actually the God Who was there before creation and Who brought creation into being, works very much alone: God creates, God speaks, God calls forth.

Very different is the God of the Exodus; at the opening of this book, God defines Himself as Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, "I will be what I will be," the essence of being into the future, the God of history. In effect, God is saying that He will be, He will effectuate, He will bring about freedom and redemption, but in an indefinite time that cannot be revealed to Moses.

Why not? Because God now has partners. Firstly His Israelite covenantal partners from the Covenant Between the Pieces of Abraham (Gen. 15); secondly, the nations roundabout and especially the very powerful Egypt; and of course the leaders of Israel, especially Moses, and Moses's brother Aaron and sister Miriam.

You see, if Genesis is the book of creation, Exodus is the book of history and history is an ongoing process between God and His Chosen Nation, between God and the nations of the world; God will effectuate, but only together with the cooperation of His partners.

For the remainder of the Five Books of the Pentateuch, Moses will be the strong towering figure, from servitude to freedom to revelation, to wandering in the desert, to our entry into Israel. And strangely enough, he is introduced in our biblical portion with no personalized mention of pedigree: "A certain man of the House of Levi went and married a Levite woman; the woman conceived and bore a son… and she hid him for three months." (Ex. 2:1).

Why are Moses's parents anonymous? Perhaps because it really doesn't matter who your parents are: It matters who you are. Perhaps because we shall learn that he had a second mother who nurtured him, who saved his life from the baby-slaying Egyptians, who named him her son (Moses, in ancient Egyptian, means "son") and brought him up in Pharaoh's palace—perhaps to teach us that only someone who came from the "outside" could free himself of the slave mentality and emancipate the Hebrew slaves. Or perhaps to teach us that although the Egyptians enslaved us, it was also an Egyptian woman who endangered her life to save a Hebrew child.

It is only in Chapter 6 of Exodus that we learn the names of Moses's biological parents, and trace his pedigree from his parents Amram and Jochebed all the way back to the Children of Jacob; and this study of his roots comes just at the time that he is about to confront Pharaoh for the first time and begin his mission to free the Hebrew slaves. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us nothing at all about Moses's parents, their characters or their activities; we are only informed their names.

To be sure, we will learn much from the Bible about the almost superhuman achievements of Moses, who was not only a great political liberator but who also "spoke to God face to face" (as it were) and revealed God's Torah laws for all posterity. We will also come to know his remarkable siblings, Aaron and Miriam.

But we cannot help but be curious about the two individuals who bore and to a great extent raised the three greatest leaders in Jewish history.

I may not know much about the parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, but I do know volumes about the grandparents of these three extraordinary people. Just imagine the circumcision ceremony which was made for Moses' father and the simhat bat for Moses's mother, rituals which must have occurred in fearful secrecy during a period of slavery and persecution.

The history of the children of Israel seems to be ending almost before it began, in the hellholes of Pithom and Raamses, in the turpitude of debasement and oppression.

Nevertheless one set of parents choose to name their son Amram, "exalted nation," and the other set of parents choose to name their daughter Jochebed, "glory to God." These grandparents had apparently been nourished on the Covenant Between the Pieces, upon the familial prophecy of "offspring who will be strangers in a land not theirs, who will be enslaved and oppressed, but…in the end will go free with great wealth" (Gen.15:13-14), and will return to the land of their fathers.

And these grandparents apparently inspired their grandchildren with faith in the exalted status of their nation, a nation that will eventually bring the blessing of freedom and morality to all the families of the earth and with the ability to give glory to God in the darkest of times because they knew that eventually His great light would shine upon all of humanity. Yes, I may not know much about Moses' parents, but by the names they bestowed upon their children I know volumes about Moses' grandparents!

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, Parashat Shemot.

The Irishman, Dr. Hugh Mullan, 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. Mullan was an existentialist philosopher. 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. Mullan 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.

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 wither 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.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Lesson of the Anonymity of Moshe Rabbeinu's Parents

The pasuk (verse) in this week's parsha says, "And a man went from the House of Levi and he married the daughter of Levi." [Shemos 2:1]. This begins what is arguably the most illustrious career in all of Jewish history—the career of Moshe Rabbeinu. This is where it all started.

However, it begins in a very anonymous and inauspicious fashion. The Torah does not even initially identify Moshe's father and mother. The Ramban writes that the reason the Torah does not identify over here the name of "the man of the House of Levi" or the name of the woman he married is for reasons of stylistic brevity. It would not help to mention the names of Amram and Yocheved here without tracing their respective genealogies back to Yaakov's son Levi, which would have been a distraction from the main flow of the narrative. Therefore, this information is omitted at this point, and presented only later (in Parshas Vaera), after the birth of the redeemer. This is a very practical answer to the question.

The Oznayim L'Torah from Rav Zalman Sorotzkin gives a somewhat more elaborate interpretation. He suggests that the Torah is sending us a message. The message is that "anybody can have a 'Moshe Rabbeinu.'" Certainly, Moshe Rabbeinu was the master of all prophets. The Torah says that there will never be a prophet comparable to him. But the idea is that there can be people who will reach tremendous stature in spite of the identity of their parents. The Oznayim L'Torah says that the reason the Torah anonymously describes Moshe's parents as "a man from the house of Levy" and a "daughter of Levy" is to convey the idea that they did not have to be anybody special to bring a very special child into the world.

It is not a requirement for the "Savior of Israel" to have a father who was the Gadol HaDor (greatest man of his generation). If truth be told, Amram was the Gadol HaDor; but if in fact the Torah would have written "And Amram went and married…" the message would be "Yeah! What do you expect? His father was the Gadol HaDor so now he will be the Gadol HaDor!" It is all in the family! The Torah therefore says "No!" It was not crucial; it was not vital; it was not necessary for Moshe Rabbeinu's father to have been Amram. He could have been anybody. The lesson is that the greatest of people can come from the plainest of parents.

It is true that there are great Rabbis, Roshei Yeshivas, and Chassidic leaders who belong to dynasties that exist in Klal Yisrael. We have the Gerer Dynasty, which began with the Chidushei HaRim and subsequently went to

his grandson the Sefas Emes, etc., etc. We have this in the Litvishe world as well—we have the Soloveitchik Dynasty. There are dynasties like that—but it does not need to be so! We see in Yeshivos all the time people who are clearly outstanding in their capabilities, and yet they come from very simple stalk.

The reason the Torah writes "And a man went from the House of Levi …" was to teach us that Moshe Rabbeinu did not necessarily become who he became by virtue of the fact that his parents happened to be Amram and Yocheved! He became who he was because he was born with a special neshama. That neshama could have been placed in anyone, regardless of the identity of his parents. This is one lesson from this pasuk.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky says there is another very important lesson over here as well: The Torah wants to emphasize and make clear that Moshe Rabbeinu was a person who was born of a man and a woman. There was nothing magical or mystical about his genesis and how he came into the world. A man married a woman and they had a baby. That baby happened to turn out to be the savior of Israel.

Rav Yaakov writes that this is a foundational belief in the Jewish faith. This is unlike the prevalent belief in the non-Jewish world. They had to create a savior for themselves. They had to invent the idea that he was supernaturally conceived through a holy spirit and things of that nature. They had to hypothesize the concept of Immaculate Conception—someone who was not a son of man, but a "son of G-d".

This, Rav Yaakov says, points to one of the fundamental differences between Judaism and Christianity. In Judaism, there is no contradiction between spirituality and materialism. We have a physical body, but it is permeated by a soul, a spiritual component integrated with the body's physical component. The soul has the capacity to spiritually elevate the physical body.

Rav Yaakov writes that although they also believe in a soul, it is as if it is in a closed compartment. The body is intrinsically unholy, while the soul is in its own compartment, and never the twain shall meet.

That is not the Torah's theology. Therefore, the Torah is making a specific point here in telling us that a man and a woman bore Moshe Rabbeinu. In Judaism, this synthesis between body and soul allows for a theology in which a holy union between man and woman takes place, through which another potentially holy body and soul is conceived.

In his commentary on this pasuk in Shemos, Rav Yaakov cross-references a comment he made in Chapter 2 of Sefer Bereshis. There he cites a Medrashic dispute between Rav Eliezer and Rav Yehoshua. Rav Eliezer says, "All that is in the heavens was created in the heavens; all that is in the earth (i.e., on land) was created from the earth." Rav Yehoshua disagrees and says, "All that is created both in heaven and on earth was created in the heavens."

Rav Yaakov sees this very same theological dispute as to how we look at the physical and the spiritual in this dispute between Tannaim. The physical, down here—according to Rav Eliezer—had to be created down here. It could not have been created in Heaven because, "the Heaven belongs (exclusively) to Hashem and the earth He gave to mankind" [Tehillim 115:16]. Rav Yehoshua argues and says, "No. Everything came from Heaven. It is no contradiction."

Rav Yaakov makes an interesting correlation between another Talmudic dispute between these same two authorities [Beitzah 15b]. Rav Eliezer says a person must spend his Yom Tov either (all) eating and drinking or (all) sitting (in shul davening) and learning. Rav Yehoshua says Yom Tov should be split – half devoted to Hashem (e.g., sitting and learning) and half devoted to oneself (e.g., eating and drinking).

Rav Yaakov finds consistency between the respective opinions of each Tanna in these two disputes. Rav Eliezer sees a dichotomy between the physical and spiritual, and therefore says the Yom Tov celebration is an "either/or" proposition. The Torah makes us choose one way or the other for celebrating our holiday and we must be consistent with that form of enjoyment throughout the day. Physical and spiritual enjoyment cannot be melded together; there can be no synthesis. This correlates with his view of how the world was created.

Rav Yehoshua disagrees. There is no contradiction between spiritual enjoyment and physical enjoyment. One can enjoy "Half for Hashem, and Half for yourselves."

It is interesting to note that on Shavuos—the holiday which represents the giving of the Torah—there is no dispute. There even Rav Eliezer admits that the enjoyment on Shavuos needs to include a dimension of "Lachem" (personal physical enjoyment).

Rav Yaakov further points out that people from other nations can bring a Korban (Sacrifice) but only a Korban Olah (the one sacrificial offering which is entirely burnt on the Mizbayach). By all other sacrifices, either the Kohanim and/or the owner (Ba'alim) of the offering also consume the meat of the animal. Here again, Rav Yaakov explains, the issue is that they cannot relate to the synthesis between spirituality and physicality. They can only relate to a Sacrifice which is 100% spiritual—one in which all the fats and meat of the offering are burnt on the Mizbayach.

Jews can relate to this synthesis. We can handle the belief that we have a savior who was born to a man and a woman. We believe that our eating can be for the sake of Heaven; our drinking can be for the sake of Heaven; our business can be for the sake of Heaven; and our intimate activities can all be for the sake of Heaven. This is the spiritual challenge of a Jew. The Torah began the narration of the story of the birth of the savior of Israel by telling us that "A man went from the House of Levi and married the daughter of Levi…" and they had a child who became the savior of Israel—in order to emphasize this point.

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What makes a good leader great? In Parashat Shemot, we are told that Moshe was tending the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law. When he was standing at the foot of Mount Chorev he noticed a burning bush. Then, coming closer to the bush, Hashem appeared from within it and charged him with the responsibility to deliver our people from Egypt.

Why was Moshe, of all people, selected to be our leader? Let us have a look at the passage immediately preceding this. There we find that Moshe was on the run. He was fleeing for his life, from Pharaoh, king of Egypt having saved the life of a fellow Israelite by killing an Egyptian taskmaster. And now Moshe arrived in Midyan. He came to a well and he noticed an injustice: The first people to arrive at the well side were the seven daughters of Jethro with their flocks. But male shepherd after male shepherd had come along and pushed them aside. Moshe would not tolerate such unfairness – he stepped forward and personally watered the flocks of the daughters of Jethro. After that Jethro invited him into his home where he got to know one of the daughters, Tzipora, whom he married. Now let's consider that action of Moshe – it was particularly brave! After all, there was a price on his head, this was high risk! Surely he would not want to attract attention to himself now that he was a stranger in the land of Midyan. However, seeing an injustice, he was simply unwilling to stand idly by. He had to come and protect the rights of others.

The fact that Hashem chose Moshe to be the leader of our people at this specific moment teaches us that in Hashem's eyes what makes a good leader great, is not only being concerned with those within your own group but with those well beyond it. A great leader is somebody who leads his or her people but at the same time, is there for the rest of humanity because every single human being is created in the image of Hashem.

OTS Dvar Torah

The Torah of the Father, and the Torah of the Teacher - Rabbi Sarel Rosenblatt

Hashem gave the Torah to a particular nation, at a particular time, based on a special perspective on the nation receiving the Torah. Hashem wants to give us the Torah personally,

through a one-on-one encounter, relating to us on a personal level and revealing Himself to each individual in a unique way, based on that individual's character traits.

The Book of Exodus is the book of redemption, the book that recounts the giving of the Torah, and it begins where the Book of Genesis left off. "These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob, each coming with his household". This is meant to teach us that the Book of Exodus is "placed atop" the Book of Genesis. It is as if the Torah was commanding us to read the Book of Exodus, not as a separate book, in its own right. From this point onward, we'll be referring to the children of Israel as the nation of Israel. However, this verse is here to remind us that those who went down to Egypt and those who left it were all part of Jacob's family. While the Book of Exodus is about the chosen people, who left Egypt, received the Torah and erected the mishkan, or the Tabernacle, the Book of Genesis is about family, challenges, hardships and the rises and falls affecting the cohesiveness of the family.

The first book of the Pentateuch seems to be seeking out a family that behaves with proper derech eretz, morality and responsibility. The desired derech eretz is one that reflects the proper divine unity. In this state, a person observes someone else who is completely different, yet sees that person as one who reflects part of that divine unity. In this story, the recurring motif is about one who continues the tradition, and other who is cast out. This is the case for Cain and Abel, Abraham and Lot, Isaac and Ishmael, and Jacob and Esau. Only our forefather Jacob reaches the spiritual plane where he understands that the divine blessing can and should be transmitted through an entire family, that is, through brothers who are as different from one another as night and day.

"… and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him." (Genesis 49:28)

Jacob is the one who manages to relate to each of his sons on a personal level, and by doing so, he teaches us the secret of unity, which, to our surprise, emerges through that diversity. To summarize, we've learned two basic principles from the Book of Genesis:

The divine blessing is transmitted through the ties between parents and their children, and though the unique fabric of the family.

The parents' challenge toward their children, and the challenge between the siblings, is to understand that unity emerges through diversity.

Now that the family is united, we can proceed to the book that recounts the giving of the Torah.It isn't our father that gives us the Torah. It's Moses, our teacher. The Torah itself, which is given on Mount Sinai in the form of two stone tablets, is an impersonal law that treats everyone equally, from the mighty to the meek. Through the two first books of the Pentateuch, Hashem would like to teach us that His revelation and blessing upon the world passes through two main channels – through the family, and through the Torah. Rabbi Yehuda Leon Ashkanazi ("Manitou") calls these two channels Torat Ha'av ("the Torah of the Father"), and Torat Ha'rav ("the Torah of the Teacher). This arrangement is crucial, because the Torah is like a divine light, which we shine into the vessel we call family. This vessel doesn't just contain the light – it also gives the light its form.

This is the deeper meaning of derech eretz kadmah latorah. The Kabbalah teaches us that the spiritual plane our forefathers attained is associated with working on our midot, our character, while Moshe Rabbenu is associated with mohin, knowledge. We can all be equal according in our own minds and logical thinking. We can all agree upon mathematical and scientific equations. What sets us apart is our character, our midot, and the balance between character traits that varies from one person to the next. Some identify more with kindness, others identify more with justice, and so on. The differences between us emerge mainly because of our emotional orientation.

Our sages teach us that no decree is imposed on the public unless the public is able to withstand it (Babylonian Talmud 67:36). The Chatam Sofer, in his commentary on Tractate Gittin, chapter 36, explains that this principle applies not only to decrees made by the sages. It is taught by the giving of the Torah itself. Hashem gave the Torah to a particular nation, at a particular time, based on a special perspective on the nation receiving the Torah. These might answer a different question: Why was the Torah given against the backdrop of such a unique revelation of the God? Couldn't He have simply given Moshe Rabbenu a book of laws and commandments, that Moshe would teach the people of Israel?

Based on what we've stated previously, we could suggest that Hashem wants to give us the Torah personally, through a one-on-one encounter. This personal attention applies on the general level as well, in terms of how God relates to the family fabric of the people of Israel. It also applies on a personal level, that is, the revelation is personal and uniquely adapted to each individual, based on the individual's character.

For years, educators and Torah scholars wanted to remove students, both boys and girls, from their homes (which were general perceived as having paved the way for superficiality and a wavering approach to religion), and educate them in the way of the "truth". The educators believes that they could use logical proofs of the presence of the Almighty and the veracity of the Torah to unite everyone in the knowledge of truth: "They, too, diverting attention from the "I"… stuffing the brains and hearts with all things that are foreign to them, and the "I" gradually become forgotten…" (Rabbi Avraham Isaac Hakohen Kook, Orot Hakodesh, volume 3, page 140). Anyone who cherishes the soul and the Torah of Israel must understand that the Torah was given to the family, to the nation, to those with unique characters. We cannot, and we do not desire to disconnect the student from his or her home. To the contrary, educators must do their utmost to view children on a personal level, and see the goodness and grace in the religious and cultural identity that students brings with them from their homes.

We constantly complain about the social media generation, the generation that grew up on Facebook and Whatsapp, believing that discourse among its members is shallow. This is a generation for which any complex sentence and any logical profundity immediately gets labeled as "rambling". This is a generation whose rebellions aren't intended at expressing insolence; rather, these rebellions are a result of their "appetite". Aside from the desire to raise the discourse level and educate others to think deeply, I feel this presents us with a great opportunity. We are returning to the generation where discourse revolves around values. These values are intrinsically tied to a generation seeking to bring out the uniqueness of each individual. This truly reminds us of the culture of idolatry, as Rabbi Kook explains in Zar'onim – "a wise man is preferably to a prophet" – and this is the source of our fears. However, if our words are candid, we could raise a generation preparing itself for the age of prophecy, as well.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber

The First and Last Redeemers: Proofs and Mission

"Moshe answered and said, 'Behold they will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice, but they will say, "The Lord has not appeared to you."'" (Shemos 4:1).[1] In response to these words of Moshe Rabbeinu - presenting the argument before Hashem that the Jewish people will not accept Moshe's role as the redeemer without proof, Hashem instructs Moshe to perform three signs before the nation: changing his staff into a snake, causing tzara'as on his own hand, and converting water into blood. The midrashim and commentaries present diametrically opposed interpretations as to the validity of Moshe's claim. They also offer different approaches both concerning the need for three signs and the symbolism behind them.[2]

Moshe was the first redeemer, the first mashiach if you will; even if not formally anointed with shemen hamishcha, he was appointed as such by Hashem Yisborach. Rambam (Hilchos Melachim 12:3 quoted further on) defines the messianic mission as leading the Jewish people out of exile, teaching them Torah and bringing them closer

to observing mitzvos, successfully warring against the enemies of Israel, and building the Beis HaMikdash. Moshe's role certainly consisted of all of these. (He built the mishkan and originally was supposed to lead the Jews into Eretz Yisrael and build the mikdash.) In the language of Chazal (see Koheles Rabba 1:1 and other places), he is dubbed the "go'eil rishon", and the "go'eil acharon", Mashiach ben Dovid, will share common characteristics with Moshe Rabbeinu. (Also see Rambam, Hilchos Teshuva 9:2.) Since Jewish history has seen its fair share of false messiahs, one can certainly understand Moshe's concern. Indeed, Rashba (Responsa, 1:548) writes the following about the identification of the redeemer:
[The nation of] Israel, the inheritors of the true religion...[are] more willing to suffer exile...than believe in something until they investigate thoroughly that which is told to them even concerning that which appears to be an os and mofeis...Even the Jews [in Egypt] who were subject to back breaking, harsh labor [with] Moshe having been commanded to inform them [of the imminent redemption], with all that, [Moshe] said "They will not believe me!" and he needed several miracles [to prove himself]. This is a true indicator to our people, the people of G-;d, not to be convinced of something, until they investigate it thoroughly.

Rashi (4:2,3,6,8), by contrast, quotes Chazal as criticizing Moshe for questioning the belief of the people concerning his appointment as the redeemer. Moshe is viewed as having spoken lashon hara about them, and the first two signs were meant to indicate his sin by showing him a snake, the first creature to speak lashon hara about its Creator, and by making his hand leprous, tzara'as being a punishment for lashon hara. Rashi quotes the midrash which even explains that by Moshe performing these signs before the people, this would demonstrate to the Jewish people how much Hashem had confidence in their belief such that Moshe who dared express lack of confidence in it was immediately smitten by tzara'as.

Chazal's view, at first glance, is difficult. Are the Jewish people expected to believe in any person who claims that he is the redeemer?! This objection was exactly the thrust of Rav Sasportas' (Tzitas Noveil Tzvi, p. 66) blistering attack against those - even Rabbinic personalities - who believed, at least initially, in the messiahship of Shabbetai Tzvi. In his words: "Have you seen in any book that we are obligated to believe in anyone who states, 'I am the messiah'?! [Without proof] anyone who wishes to be crowned with the title of mashiach will do so if his piousness is evident, and in accordance with the number of pious people will be the number of messiahs!"

The commentaries on Rashi rally to defend this view of Chazal asserting that there was proof of Moshe's appointment even without the need for signs. Rashi earlier (3:18) quotes the midrash that the Jewish people had a tradition from Ya'akov Avinu and Yosef that the redeemer will present himself with the language of "pakod pakad'ti - I have surely remembered you". Hashem revealed this language to Moshe (3:16) who told it to the elders of Israel (4:31). Ramban (3:18) questions the value of this presentation as a proof since it would have been possible that Moshe learned it while he was in Egypt just as the elders knew it. He suggests that the elders of Israel had a tradition from Ya'akov Avinu that the first person to present these words would, in fact, be the redeemer, thus eliminating the possibility of impostors. Alternatively, Ramban answers based on a midrash which asserts that Moshe left Egypt at the age of 12 before the age of bar mitzvah when this sign would have been given over to the children. Maharal (Gur Aryeh ibid.) challenges both answers, the first one based on the fact the Hashem would certainly allow human free choice enabling an impostor to misappropriate the phrase. Consequently, he suggests that the key phrase "pakod pakad'ti" would merely serve as a means of piquing the B'nei Yisrael's interest so that they would listen to Moshe but would not conclusively prove his appointment; he would then prove himself through the subsequent miracles performed before them.[3]

The Torah states concerning the miracle of k'rias Yam Suf, "(14:31) "ויאמינו בד' ובמשה עבדו. Since the Torah states that they then believed in Moshe, it would appear that the former confirmation of Moshe as the redeemer was not fully settled in the minds of Israel until his mission had been completed by the utter destruction of the Egyptian pursuers. In other words, Moshe proved his messiahship conclusively by doing no less than doing what the redeemer is supposed to do - redeem the Jewish people. What emerges then are two different models of the redeemer proving his authenticity: performing miracles or stating some kind of "password" on the one hand versus actually causing the redemption on the other.

These same two models are at the root of a Rishonic debate as to how the final redeemer will prove himself. Famously, the Talmud (Sanhedrin 93b) comments that when Bar Kochba claimed that he was mashiach, the Sages asked him to rule on a halachic matter through smell based on the verse in Yeshayahu "והריחו ביראת ד'". After he failed the test, they killed him. Ra'avad quotes this as the normative condition necessary for mashiach. Similarly, Rambam in his Iggeres Teiman states: "A previously unknown man will arise. The signs and miracles which will be performed by him are the proofs of the truth of his lineage." But this assertion is contradicted by no less an authority than Rambam himself! In Hilchos Melachim (11:3) Rambam writes: One should not presume that the Messianic king must work miracles and wonders, bring about new phenomena in the world, resurrect the dead, or perform other similar deeds. This is definitely not true.[4]

Rambam then proceeds to prove his point from Bar Kochba since R' Akiva and the other sages did not ask him to perform miracles to prove his messiahship! Kesef Mishne notes that Rambam relied on other midrashim which differ from the aforementioned Gemara Sanhedrin quoted by Ra'avad. Rambam (11:4) then proceeds to state his view of how mashiach proves himself:
If a king will arise from the House of David who diligently studies the Torah and observes its commandments according to the Written and Oral Torah as David, his ancestor [did], will compel all of Israel to walk in its ways and rectify the breaches in its observance, and fight the wars of God, he is the presumed mashiach. If he succeeds in the above, builds the Temple in its place, and gathers the dispersed of Israel, he is the certain mashiach.

Several recent commentaries[5] suggest a resolution of these seemingly contradictory sources. As explored elsewhere,[6] the Gemara in Sanhedrin (98a) presents the statement of R. Yehoshua ben Leivi that there are two tracks of redemption: an on-time, natural track and a rushed, supernatural track. The latter depends on merit; the former does not. If the redemption is natural, then mashiach will prove his credentials by performing messianic activities as mentioned by Rambam in Hilchos Melachim. If we merit a rushed redemption, he will prove his role through miracles. A recent, prominent Jewish thinker added that each model is a foretaste of what era he will usher in. If the redemption is on time and will usher in a natural messianic era, then it is logical that he will prove himself naturally. If, on the other hand, the redemption is based on merit and hence, begins a supernatural era, the mashiach will introduce this era with miracles. This resolution helps explain why Moshe had to perform miracles to prove himself. The redemption from Egypt was "rushed" since the original exile was supposed to be for 400 years, and instead, only lasted 210 years. Indeed, the redemption from Egypt was followed by a forty-year supernatural period of the Jewish people's sojourn in the desert, and perhaps that is why this period was introduced by Moshe's initial miracles. If Moshe had led the Jewish people into Eretz Yisrael, it is reasonable to assume that the miraculous era would have continued.

Rambam (ibid. 11:1) writes: "Anyone who does not believe in him or does not await his coming, denies not only the words of the prophets but the Torah itself and Moshe Rabbeinu". In our spiritually confused and geopolitically troubled world, it is our fervent wish that this brief summary and comparison of the revelation of the first and last redeemers should contribute to the longing for the blessed day when the true Go'eil and Master of history, Hashem Yisborach, will speedily send the true mashiach to redeem his beloved people.

[1] Translation courtesy of www.chabad.org.
[2] See Sha'arei Aharon for a summary of the approaches. Also see Abarbanel (4) and Gevuros Hashem (26-27).
[3] Maharal does not explain why, then, was Moshe accused of questioning the Jewish people's belief in his appointment and punished according to the midrash quoted by Rashi later. וצריך עיון .
[4] Translation courtesy of Rav Eliyahu Touger available at www.chabad.org.
[5] See Otzros Acharis HaYamim by Rav Yehuda Chayun (1:7 fn. 4) and others. It is from this informative compilation that many of the sources in this presentation were culled.
[6] See Beit HaMikdash: Built by Whom? and Parallels Between the Exodus from Egypt and the Final Redemption

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

A Nation is Launched

The child grew up, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became like her son. She named him Moshe, and she said, "For I drew him from the water." (Shemos 1:10)

But Moshe said to G-d, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Shemos 3:11)

Moshe said to HASHEM, "I beseech You, my Lord. I am not a man of words, neither from yesterday nor from the day before yesterday, nor from the time You have spoken to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." (Shemos 4:10)

And Moshe was eighty years old, and Aaron was eighty three years old when they spoke to Pharaoh. (Shemos 7:7)

Moshe Rabbeinu was probably the most impactful person to ever walk on this good earth. The Torah tells us that he was the most humble man on the face of the earth. He's called an "Ish Elochim" a G-dly man, and an Eved HASHEM, a servant of HASHEM. By the end of his life we are told that there will never be another prophet as great as Moshe. His lists of accomplishments are endless and never ending. He brought the Jewish People out of Egypt, he led them through a split sea, he brought the Torah down to this world. He built the Mishkan of HASHEM and shepherded the Nation of HASHEM for 40 miraculous years in the desert. That's the short list of obvious accomplishments. We are living today from the Torah he delivered and more. What a life!

If we take a look at the beginning of his life though this was all totally not to be expected. Just the opposite! He would probably have been voted in his high school graduating class as "the least likely to lead Klal Yisrael out of Egypt and deliver the Torah to mankind." He had many factors working against him.

First of all he was raised in the house of Pharaoh which was the capital of wickedness in the world. Secondly, he had a serious speech impediment that prevented him from articulating himself clearly. Thirdly, Moshe spent two thirds of his life, eighty full years alienated from the people that he would make his lasting impression upon. He probably would not have been on too many other's short list of candidates to be picked to do what he ultimately did. HASHEM must have seen something in him that was not apparent on his resume till that point. And, HASHEM chose him!

Based on a verse later on that speaks of Moshe and all Israel in the same breath, our sages tell us that Moshe was Shakel Knegged, equal to all Israel. In many ways his state of being was equal to that of the Jewish People. 1) They were enveloped in Egyptian culture which was the capital of wickedness. 2) Their voices were muted. The Zohar says that the word PESACH is a contraction for PEH- Mouth –Sach – Speaks, because the speech of Israel was in exile until PESACH. 3) They were alienated from themselves and each other to a large extent. Most of Israel were lost in the Plague of Darkness. The Jewish People were also not on a likely list to climb out of that situation and make this biggest difference in the world, just like Moshe. Yet it happened and they were redeemed as HASHEM deemed.

The poet Ogden Nash famously said, "How odd of G-d to choose the Jews!" Now, I know some people must be asking already, "Who in the world is Ogden Nash?" It's OK! There is no need to know who Ogden Nash is but everybody knows who's the Jews. Even still, it's not so rash of Ogden Nash. On the surface he may be right, but HASHEM sees the heart and has an entirely different look at people.

With HASHEM's help the seeming impossible is possible, and just like that, a star is born and so a nation is launched.

Weekly Parsha SHEMOT
Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

It is difficult to imagine a more unlikely scenario than the one described for us in the Torah as to the process of redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. We can readily understand a personality of holiness and tranquility such as Aaron becoming the hero and redeemer of the holy people of Israel. We could also easily understand that the redemption could come from negotiations and the recognition by Pharaoh and the Egyptians that it was in their best interests to allow the Jewish people who escaped from slavery. Yet, that certainly is not the way the Torah presents this story for us.

Instead, the redeemer is an unlikely figure, not even part of the Jewish story for approximately half of his lifetime. Not only that, he risked his life on behalf of the Jewish people but, in fact, was betrayed by Jews themselves. And he is a reluctant Redeemer, telling the Lord, so to speak, to find someone else to do the job for he feels that he is not capable to fulfill the task at hand.

Heaven disregards all his complaints and accepts none of his excuses. Heaven is aware of all human shortcomings and assigns great tasks for individuals to fulfill irrespective of the inadequacies that they may feel.

Moshe is the most humble and modest of all human-beings, but he is not allowed to be humble and self-effacing at this moment. We see him in his most aggressive and assertive mode when speaking to the Pharaoh. For when it comes to the time to redeem the Jewish people, he cannot be fainthearted, passive, or subservient any longer.

In our time over the past century the redemption of Israel, the ingathering of the exiles to our ancient homeland, the establishment of the state of Israel and the revival of Torah values and study in the Jewish world all have occurred in a most unusual fashion. The logical odds against it happening were and are enormous but nevertheless it has happened and in front of our very eyes. Perhaps we would have chosen to have different leaders in a different series of events and policies that could have brought all this about. But it is well known that Heaven mocks all our pretensions and predictions.

The prophets of Israel have clearly told us that our redemption is a certainty and will occur. How this will happen was never spelled out for us in detail. The Jewish people will be rebuilt in our ancient homeland of the land of Israel and we see that this is happening in our days. We are taught that the wonders that we shall see and experience in this final redemption will outdo even the wonders and miracles that marked our exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moshe over three millennia ago. Experiencing Jewish life is not for the faint hearted nor the doubters nor the weak willed. This is only one of the many insights and lessons that we can derive from the Torah reading of Shemot.

Shabbat shalom
Rabbi Berel Wein

Women as Leaders (Shemot 5781)

Rabbi Sacks *zt''l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

This week's parsha could be entitled "The Birth of a Leader." We see Moses, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, growing up as a prince of Egypt. We see him as a young man, for the first time realising the implications of his true identity. He is, and knows he is, a member of an enslaved and suffering people: "Growing up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people" (Ex. 2:10).

He intervenes – he acts: the mark of a true leader. We see him intervene three times, twice in Egypt, once in Midian, to rescue victims of violence. We then witness the great scene at the Burning Bush where God summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until God becomes angry and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the genesis of a hero.

But this is only the surface tale. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another far more remarkable story, not about a hero but about six heroines, six courageous women without whom there would not have been a Moses.

First is Yocheved, wife of Amram and mother of the three people who were to become the great leaders of the Israelites: Miriam, Aaron and Moses himself. It was Yocheved who, at the height of Egyptian persecution, had the courage to have a child, hide him for three months, and then devise a plan to give him a chance of being rescued. We know all too little of Yocheved. In her first appearance in the Torah she is unnamed. Yet, reading the narrative, we are left in no doubt about her bravery and resourcefulness. Not by accident did her children all become leaders.

The second was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter and Moses' elder sister. It was she who kept watch over the child as the small ark floated down the river, and it was she who approached Pharaoh's daughter with the suggestion that he be nursed among his own people. The biblical text paints a portrait of the young Miriam as a figure of unusual fearlessness and presence of mind. Rabbinic tradition goes further. In a remarkable Midrash, we read of how, upon hearing of the decree that every male Israelite baby would be drowned in the river, Amram led the Israelites in divorcing their wives so that there would be no more children. He had logic on his side. Could it be right to bring children into the world if there were a fifty per cent chance that they would be killed at birth? Yet his young daughter Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him and persuaded him to change his mind. "Your decree," she said, "is worse than Pharaoh's. His affects only the boys; yours affects all. His deprives children of life in this world; yours will deprive them of life even in the World to Come." Amram relented, and as a result, Moses was born.[1] The implication is clear: Miriam had more faith than her father.

Third and fourth were the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who frustrated Pharaoh's first attempt at genocide. Ordered to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17). Summoned and accused of disobedience, they outwitted Pharaoh by constructing an ingenious cover story: the Hebrew women, they said, are vigorous and give birth before we arrive. They escaped punishment and saved many lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilisation: the idea that there are moral limits to power. There are instructions that should not be obeyed. There are crimes against humanity that cannot be excused by the claim that "I was only obeying orders." This concept, generally known as "civil disobedience", is usually attributed to the nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau, and entered international consciousness after the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. Its true origin, though, lies thousands of years earlier in the actions of two women, Shifra and Puah. Through their understated courage they earned a high place among the moral heroes of history, teaching us the primacy of conscience over conformity, the law of justice over the law of the land.[2]

The fifth is Tzipporah, Moses' wife. The daughter of a Midianite priest, she was nonetheless determined to accompany Moses on his mission to Egypt, despite the fact that she had no reason to risk her life on such a hazardous venture. In a deeply enigmatic passage, we see it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4:24-26). The impression we gain of her is a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, had a better sense than Moses himself of what God requires.

I have saved until last the most intriguing of them all: Pharaoh's daughter. It was she who had the courage to rescue an Israelite child and

bring him up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people. Could we imagine a daughter of Hitler, or Eichmann, or Stalin, doing the same? There is something at once heroic and gracious about this lightly sketched figure, the woman who gave Moses his name.

Who was she? The Torah does not mention her name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4:18) references a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she whom 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."[3]

They added that she was one of the few people (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.[4]

So, on the surface, the parsha of Shemot is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women without whom there would not have been a Moses. They belong to a long tradition of strong women throughout Jewish history, from Deborah, Hannah, Ruth and Esther in the Bible to more modern religious figures like Sarah Schenirer and Nechama Leibowitz to more secular figures like Anne Frank, Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir.

How then, if women emerge so powerfully as leaders, were they excluded in Jewish law from certain leadership roles? If we look carefully we will see that women were historically excluded from two areas. One was the "crown of priesthood", which went to Aaron and his sons. The other was the "crown of kingship", which went to David and his sons. These were two roles built on the principle of dynastic succession. From the third crown – the "crown of Torah" – however, women were not excluded. There were Prophetesses, not just Prophets. The Sages enumerated seven of them (Megillah 14a). There have been great women Torah scholars always, from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) until today.

At stake is a more general distinction. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in his Responsa, Binyan Av, differentiates between formal or official authority (samchut) and actual leadership (hanhagah).[5] There are figures who hold positions of authority – prime ministers, presidents, CEOs – who may not be leaders at all. They may have the power to force people to do what they say, but they have no followers. They excite no admiration. They inspire no emulation. And there may be leaders who hold no official position at all but who are turned to for advice and are held up as role models. They have no power but great influence. Israel's Prophets belonged to this category. So, often, did the gedolei Yisrael, the great Sages of each generation. Neither Rashi nor Rambam held any official position (some scholars say that Rambam was chief rabbi of Egypt but most hold that he was not, though his descendants were). Wherever leadership depends on personal qualities – what Max Weber called "charismatic authority" – and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men.

Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Tzipporah and Batya were leaders not because of any official position they held (in the case of Batya she was a leader despite her official title as a princess of Egypt). They were leaders because they had courage and conscience. They refused to be intimidated by power or defeated by circumstance. They were the real heroes of the Exodus. Their courage is still a source of inspiration today.

Shabbat Shalom: Shemot (Exodus 1:1 – 6:1)
Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Efrat, Israel – The Book of Exodus begins the story of the people of Israel, the nation that developed from the household, or the family, of Jacob. Many are the differences between the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus, but perhaps the greatest change lies in the "personality" (as it were) of God Himself.

Genesis, the book of creation, refers to God at first as Elohim, the sum total of all the powers of the Universe, who created the heavens, the earth and all of their accoutrements. And this God of the creation, actually the God Who was there before creation and Who brought creation into being, works very much alone: God creates, God speaks, God calls forth.

Very different is the God of the Exodus; at the opening of this book, God defines Himself as Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh, "I will be what I will be," the essence of being into the future, the God of history. In effect, God is saying that He will be, He will effectuate, He will bring about freedom and redemption, but in an indefinite time that cannot be revealed to Moses.

Why not? Because God now has partners. Firstly His Israelite covenantal partners from the Covenant Between the Pieces of Abraham (Gen. 15); secondly, the nations roundabout and especially the very powerful Egypt; and of course the leaders of Israel, especially Moses, and Moses's brother Aaron and sister Miriam.

You see, if Genesis is the book of creation, Exodus is the book of history and history is an ongoing process between God and His Chosen Nation, between God and the nations of the world; God will effectuate, but only together with the cooperation of His partners.

For the remainder of the Five Books of the Pentateuch, Moses will be the strong towering figure, from servitude to freedom to revelation, to wandering in the desert, to our entry into Israel. And strangely enough, he is introduced in our biblical portion with no personalized mention of pedigree: "A certain man of the House of Levi went and married a Levite woman; the woman conceived and bore a son… and she hid him for three months." (Ex. 2:1).

Why are Moses's parents anonymous? Perhaps because it really doesn't matter who your parents are: It matters who you are. Perhaps because we shall learn that he had a second mother who nurtured him, who saved his life from the baby-slaying Egyptians, who named him her son (Moses, in ancient Egyptian, means "son") and brought him up in Pharaoh's palace—perhaps to teach us that only someone who came from the "outside" could free himself of the slave mentality and emancipate the Hebrew slaves. Or perhaps to teach us that although the Egyptians enslaved us, it was also an Egyptian woman who endangered her life to save a Hebrew child.

It is only in Chapter 6 of Exodus that we learn the names of Moses's biological parents, and trace his pedigree from his parents Amram and Jochebed all the way back to the Children of Jacob; and this study of his roots comes just at the time that he is about to confront Pharaoh for the first time and begin his mission to free the Hebrew slaves. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us nothing at all about Moses's parents, their characters or their activities; we are only informed their names.

To be sure, we will learn much from the Bible about the almost superhuman achievements of Moses, who was not only a great political liberator but who also "spoke to God face to face" (as it were) and revealed God's Torah laws for all posterity. We will also come to know his remarkable siblings, Aaron and Miriam.

But we cannot help but be curious about the two individuals who bore and to a great extent raised the three greatest leaders in Jewish history.

I may not know much about the parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, but I do know volumes about the grandparents of these three extraordinary people. Just imagine the circumcision ceremony which was made for Moses' father and the simhat bat for Moses's mother, rituals which must have occurred in fearful secrecy during a period of slavery and persecution.

The history of the children of Israel seems to be ending almost before it began, in the hellholes of Pithom and Raamses, in the turpitude of debasement and oppression.

Nevertheless one set of parents choose to name their son Amram, "exalted nation," and the other set of parents choose to name their daughter Jochebed, "glory to God." These grandparents had apparently been nourished on the Covenant Between the Pieces, upon the familial prophecy of "offspring who will be strangers in a land not theirs, who

will be enslaved and oppressed, but…in the end will go free with great wealth" (Gen.15:13-14), and will return to the land of their fathers.

And these grandparents apparently inspired their grandchildren with faith in the exalted status of their nation, a nation that will eventually bring the blessing of freedom and morality to all the families of the earth and with the ability to give glory to God in the darkest of times because they knew that eventually His great light would shine upon all of humanity. Yes, I may not know much about Moses' parents, but by the names they bestowed upon their children I know volumes about Moses' grandparents!

Shabbat Shalom!

Insights Parshas Shemos Teves 5781

Yeshiva Beis Moshe Chaim/Talmudic University

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights has been generously sponsored by Mr. Albert & Mrs. Sindy Benalloun in memory of his dear parents, Yosef bar Abraham z"l & Elisa Benhamu Pinto bat Mesoda z"l. "May their Neshamas have an Aliya!"

Growing Pains

It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens… (2:11)

This week's parsha introduces Pharaoh's scheme and implementation of the Jewish enslavement. The Torah also discusses Moshe's birth and development, and how he came to be the greatest prophet and leader of the Jewish people.

It is well known that Moshe grew up in Pharaoh's house. Rashi (ad loc) explains that not only did Moshe grow into adulthood, he grew in stature as well. As Rashi explains, "Pharaoh appointed him over his household ('beis Pharaoh')." Rashi, by the Aseres Hadibros (20:2), explains that the Jewish slaves were owned directly by Pharaoh and were part of 'beis Pharaoh.' Thus, Pharaoh took the innovative step of appointing Moshe over his fellow Jews.

This was no accident. Many tyrants and despots appoint members of the victim class over the other victims. In fact, in Egypt the "shotrim" were Jewish officers appointed over the other slaves in Egypt to violently enforce quotas (which the shotrim refused to do). Similarly, cruel kapos were the method used by the Nazis to control prisoners in the concentration camps.

Theoretically, this is brilliant. It naturally pits members of the oppressed class against one another and breeds mistrust and deception; thereby destroying the unity of the group – exactly what it is supposed to achieve. Pharaoh also added an insidious twist: By appointing Moshe over them, Pharaoh was showcasing what a Jew can aspire to if he abandons his culture and becomes fully Egyptian.

But Pharaoh underestimated Moshe. He expected Moshe to sympathize with them and, at most, perhaps even advocate for better treatment. Yet Rashi makes a remarkable comment on the words "and he saw their burdens" (2:11); "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them." Moshe didn't merely sympathize and feel pity for them, Moshe empathized with them. Sympathy is merely seeing someone's pain and feeling bad for him; however, empathy is a vicarious experience of what another is going through.

Rashi is telling us that Moshe focused his eyes and heart to see what the slaves saw and feel what the slaves felt; he was seeing their situation from their perspective. In fact, Moshe later uses this understanding in his conversations with Hashem. This is probably one of the reasons Moshe was asked by Hashem to fill the role he did.

This is also why Moshe is sentenced to death for killing the Egyptian. On the face of it, this seems a little strange. A prince growing up in the house of a king would rarely be subject to such justice. But once Moshe kills the Egyptian because of what he did to a "lowly" Jew he undermines Pharaoh's vision for his position in the palace – therefore he must flee for his life.

A Calling for Service

The anger of Hashem burned against Moshe and he said, "Is not your brother Aharon the Levi? I know that he will speak, behold he is coming out to meet and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart" (4:14).

After a full week of trying to persuade Moshe to accept the position of redeemer of Bnei Yisroel, Hashem displays anger toward Moshe. This follows the last of Moshe's objections as to why he should not be the one charged with this responsibility. Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem's anger at Moshe's final argument resulted in him losing the position of Kohen, and being "demoted" to position of Levi.

Additionally, Rashi (ad loc) explains that Moshe was concerned that Aharon would be jealous of his new leadership position. Hashem therefore reassured him that Aharon would actually be happy for him. Rashi also points out that it was for this reason that Aharon merited to become Kohen.

This seems a little hard to understand. Certainly Moshe wouldn't accuse Aharon of being a lesser man than he, so this means that had the roles been reversed and he had been in Aharon's sandals, Moshe himself would have been jealous. Why would Moshe be jealous, and if in fact it was natural to be jealous of this appointment, why wasn't Aharon himself jealous?

Interestingly enough, we do find an instance in the Torah where Moshe feels a twinge of jealousy. The Yalkut Shimoni (Devarim 31:941) points out that Moshe experienced jealousy when he saw Yehoshua, his very own student, supplant him as leader of Bnei Yisroel and receive a communication from Hashem that he himself wasn't privy to. Moshe said, "It is better to experience one thousand deaths than to experience one instance of jealousy."

Clearly Moshe felt jealous because he saw his student taking his place, and the pain of seeing the loss of one's own position can be overwhelming. So why didn't Aharon feel jealous? After all, his younger brother was being given a position of leadership that rightfully belonged to him.

Aharon recognized that while it's true that redeeming Bnei Yisroel and becoming their leader was a position of greatness, it's not an appointment. In other words, when Hashem asks you to take this role, it's one primarily of service to Bnei Yisroel and Hashem's plan for the world. This job isn't about the stature that comes with the responsibility, it's about being a servant to that responsibility.

Moshe was bothered by the stature associated with the job. He spends a week explaining why he isn't the right person for this job. When at the end of the week he still feels that Aharon would be jealous of his new position, Hashem gets angry and explains to him that Aharon understands that this is about responsibility to serve – not the associated stature. It is for this reason that Moshe loses the right to be a Kohen and this role is given to Aharon. Kohanim are "Meshorsei Hamelech" – ministers of the king. There is no sense of stature in this leadership role; only responsibility to serve Hashem. Aharon understood that when called to the responsibility of serving Hashem you have to accept and that stature plays no role in the decision.

Did You Know...

In this week's parsha, Moshe was born hidden from sight, and subsequently found by Pharaoh's daughter Basya. The Torah says that Basya named him Moshe, one of his famously numerous names. Let us examine some of his other names and how they came to be. Based on the Midrash (Vayikrah Rabbah 1:3):

1. Yered (ירד), implying "descent": According to one opinion, Moshe was called this name because he brought the Torah down to the Jewish people, and the Shechina back down to this physical world.
2. Avigdor (אבי גדור): He was the chief one of those who made fences (safeguards) around the Torah.
3. Chever (חבר): One view is that Moshe joined (חיבר) the Jewish people with Hashem (Eitz Yosef, citing Gra), or because he prevented (העביר) disaster from coming to this world (Matnos Kehuna).
4. Avi Socho (אבי סוכו): Moshe would grow up to be the father of all the Neviim who see (סוכין) through Ruach Hakosdesh.
5. Yekutiel (יקותיאל): One opinion says that he caused Bnei Yisroel to look with hope (קוין) towards Hashem.
6. Avi Zanoach (אבי זנוח): Because Moshe caused Bnei Yisroel to abandon למזניחים)) idol worship.

7. Tuviah (טוביה): "She saw that he was good (טוב)" (Shemos 2:2). There's an argument (Shemos Rabbah 1:20) as to whether his name is Tov or Tuviah. Moreover, whether it means he was fit for nevuah, that he was born circumcised, or that when he was born the whole house filled with light.
8. Shemayah ben Nesanel: Hashem heard (שמע) his prayers about the golden calf, and he was the son (בן) to whom the Torah was given (נתנה) from Hashem (א-ל).
9. Levi (לוי): Named after the shevet to which Moshe belonged.
10. Moshe: In Egyptian, Moshe means son. Basya took him as a son (Ibn Ezra). Alternatively, it comes from the Egyptian word "mo" (water) and "uses" (drown from) (Josephus, Antiquities 2:9:6). Some sources state that his Egyptian name was Monius (Ibn Ezra). Interestingly, Hashem told Moshe, "I will call you only by the name you were called by Basya" (Vayikrah Rabbah 1:3).

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For the week ending 9 January 2021 / 25 Tevet 5781
Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Parshat Shemot
Traitor to Whom?

Pharaoh said, "Come let us deal cleverly with it (the People of Israel), lest it become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies and wage war against us and go up from the land." (1:10)

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote that the majority of the scientists who built the American atom bomb were Jewish. Among others: Leo Szilard, Niels Bohr, Aage Bohr, Lise Meitner, Rudolf Peierls, Otto Frisch, Walter Zinn, Edward Teller and J. Robert Oppenheimer. It's interesting that more than one or two of the atom spies for the Soviet Union were also Jewish. Even though Klaus Fuchs was the son of a Lutheran pastor and John Cairncross, one of the "Cambridge Five" wasn't a Jew, Morris and Lona Cohen, Theodore Hall, George Korval, Saville Sax, Oscar Seborer, Morton Sobell, Irving Lerner, Arthur Adams, David Greenglas, Harry Gold and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were all Jewish.

Sometimes we are faced with a choice that makes us a traitor no matter what we decide. This type of decision will make us either a traitor to our country or a traitor to our principles. Before Stalin murdered his millions, many looked towards Russia as a Utopia. To the mind of a Jew, much was right about Communism. Typically, Jews have been at the front of every social revolution in history. The idea of a social contract, the idea of equality under the law, of society's responsibility to care for the poor and sick, the downtrodden and the dispossessed, are some of the Torah's most outstanding gifts to mankind — and to Socialist thought. In addition, these spies also saw the exclusive American possession of atomic weapons as a threat to world peace in the post-World War II world.

Typically, the Jewish atom spies received no financial reward except for their expenses. (Mind you, several received the Red Star and a lifetime pass to travel on Moscow's public transport — not too much use in Brooklyn…)

Pharaoh said, "Come let us deal cleverly with it (the People of Israel), lest it become numerous, and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies and wage war against us and go up from the land." (1:10) Pharaoh sensed that the Jews march to a different drum — the drum of conscience, even when the drum may lead to treachery.

True, there have been few whose conscience has lead to such tragic mistakes. But, how many incomparably more is the number of those who have used that gift of conscience, a gift from Above, to serve their country, society and humanity with total loyalty and fidelity!

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Shemot: Imagining Redemption
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Passover, Pesach, is approaching. Fast approaching.

Now you may argue that it is still almost a full three months away, and you'd be right. But those who study Daf Yomi, the daily study of a page of Talmud, are already several weeks into their in-depth reading of the tractate of Pesachim and are already steeped in discussions about the search for chametz, leavened bread, and its elimination, and are considering the definitional parameters of matzah, unleavened bread, and marror, bitter herbs.

Of course, Daf Yomi students are accustomed to taking the long-range view, and, wouldn't you know it, they will be completing this fascinating tractate which treats the holiday of Passover so comprehensively during the week just prior to erev Pesach, a mere several days before the eve of Passover!

Those of us who are not committed to the rigorous Daf Yomi daily regime, which includes the great majority of Jewish people, will begin our rapid and inexorable march toward Passover this week. For it is on this Shabbat that we begin the book of Shemot, the story of the Exodus. And henceforth, for many weeks, every weekly Torah portion deals, in a dazzling variety of ways, with the drama of our servitude and our redemption, with the heroes of the Exodus and with its villains.

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

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

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

But I have often thought that we are called upon for an extremely unique and quite challenging preparation which is often overlooked. I refer to the passage in the haggadah which originates in the Mishnah and which reads:

In each and every generation, a person is obligated to see himself, lirot et atzmo, as if he personally left Egypt, as it is written, "And you shall explain to your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I went free from Egypt.'" (Exodus 13:8).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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Rabbi Buchwald's Weekly Torah Message - Shemot 5781-2021
“The Not-So-Obvious Process of Hebrew Enslavement”
(revised and updated from parashat Shemot 5761-2001)
Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week’s parasha, parashat Shemot, we begin our annual encounter with the story of the Egyptian enslavement of the Jewish people.

The Sons of Israel come down to Egypt as free people. They receive a royal invitation from Pharaoh himself, who in fact sends the royal “movers” to bring their families and belongings from Canaan to Egypt. The patriarch, Jacob, is welcomed at a special audience with Pharaoh himself, and the Sons of Israel are given privileged status, and serve as royal shepherds. To top it all, the children of Israel are granted their own land, the land of Goshen, where they may practice their unique Jewish lifestyle without interference. After all, Jacob was quite concerned that his children would quickly assimilate if they came down to Egypt and lived among the Egyptians.

And yet, despite all the preventive measures–we know that assimilate they did! We learn this from the festival of Passover, which literally means that G-d had to “pass over” the houses of the Jewish people when the Angel of Death struck the Egyptian first-born. Why would that be necessary? After all, the Jews lived separately from the Egyptians–in their own land of Goshen.

According to the Midrash, since the period of “enslavement” is calculated from the birth of Isaac, the number of years that the Jews actually dwelt in Egypt was 210 years. The number of years that the Jews actually performed “hard labor” was approximately 110 years. Obviously, during those 210 years, many Jews got tired of living in the Egyptian “Boro Park” and moved out of Goshen, to the more mainstream, upscale areas where they lived in closer proximity to the Egyptians.

If you check carefully in this week’s parasha there is no mention in the entire parasha of any official decree formalizing the enslavement by Pharaoh. Perhaps, that is what is meant by Pharaoh’s words when he says, (Exodus 1:10): הָבָה נִתְחַכְּמָה לוֹ, “Come, let us deal wisely with the Jews.” Perhaps he means: We need not directly enslave them. We can, after all, accomplish our objective with subtlety and etiquette, and emerge with clean hands.

According to many commentators, the Egyptians employed a shrewd strategy, calling upon the civic sensibilities of the Jewish people, in order to draw the Hebrews into the process of assimilation. Scripture informs us (Exodus 1:11), that the Jews built the great storehouses in the land of Egypt, Pitom and Ramses. Were they forced to build them? Nothing in the text suggests that. Perhaps, there was social pressure. Pharaoh might have said: “And so, my fellow Egyptians, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.” And, as we know, our civic-minded Jews are always Johnny-on-the-spot to volunteer. And so it was. The ancient Hebrews volunteer their talents, resources and efforts to build this important national project. They become, in effect, more Egyptian than the Egyptians, setting a pattern of behavior that Jews were to follow throughout their long history in the Diaspora.

The Jews in Egypt said to themselves: “We are, after all, acculturated, sophisticated Jewish Egyptians”–the equivalent of today’s Jewish Americans. “We no longer need to live in ghettos. Have no fear, Oh father, Jacob! Surely you have no doubt that we will be able to maintain our Jewish identities, even outside the Ghettos?!” But, as we know, there is no truth to that proposition. Without intensive Jewish environment, good schools, and a strong commitment to Jewish rituals, Jewish identity quickly evaporates.

Eventually, the Jews do become physically-persecuted slaves in Egypt, and are forced to do rigorous labor against their will. Yet, the message of parashat Shemot is that the Jewish people probably became slaves long before the Egyptians enforced slavery upon them. Long before the back-breaking labor, the Sons of Israel had probably become slaves to Egyptian culture, Egyptian fashion and Egyptian values. It was inevitable that these committed Jewish-Egyptian “patriots” would become so deeply dedicated to Egypt politically, civically and emotionally that they would ultimately be unable to extricate themselves.

Is this what is happening to American Jewry today? I hate to spoil the party, but it seems to be so. The American Jewish Committee survey

from way back in the year 2000 reported that most American Jews have already defined-down their observance and notions of Judaism. We know that American Jews are the least observant of all religious groups in America. Jews attend synagogue far less frequently than other religious groups attend their houses of worship. For most of American Jews, the quality of Jewish life in America for most Jews has been in the process of decline for more than 50 years. It was inevitable that most Jews would eventually conclude that there is really nothing so terrible with intermarriage. The recent American Jewish Committee survey reports that a whopping 56% find nothing wrong with intermarriage, and only a paltry 12% strongly object to it. Even more amazing, were the recent criticisms leveled at the Birthright trips to Israel for promoting Jewish in-marriage!

And, so, the bottom line is: You don't need a Pharaoh or taskmasters to be enslaved. "Slavery" can be the direct result of one fateful little word, "attitude."

May you be blessed.

Drasha Parshas Shemos
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
Pushing the Envelope

This week's portion introduces us to Moshe Rabeinu, the messenger of Hashem who redeems the Jewish nation from Egypt. We are told of Hashem's proposal to Moshe to lead the Jews out of Egypt, and how Moshe refuses the opportunity.

First Moshe responds, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11) After Hashem assures him of his ability Moshe asks, "When I go to the nation and they ask me, 'what is His name?' what shall I say?" (Exodus 3:14)

Hashem responds again. Then Moshe respectfully demurs, "But they will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice, they will say "Hashem did not appear to you!"" (Exodus 4:1) Again Hashem responds by giving Moshe two miraculous signs that he, when challenged, should in turn show to the Jewish nation.

And again Moshe is hesitant. "Please my L-rd," he cries, "I am not a man of words, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech." Once again Hashem rejoins, "Who made a mouth for man or makes one deaf, or dumb, sighted or blind? Is it not I, Hashem!" (Exodus 4:10-11)

Hashem patiently responds to each of Moshe's excuses with a clearly defined rebuttal. Except when Moshe makes what proves to be his final plea. After exhausting all of his excuses, Moshe, seems desperate to absolve himself of the task and declares, "Send the one whom you usually send!" (Exodus 4:13) According to Rashi, Moshe was referring to Ahron, who prophesized to the Jews even before Moshe and throughout the time that Moshe was hiding in Midian.

Suddenly, the conciliatory answers cease. "The rage of Hashem burned against Moshe." Hashem declares to Moshe that Ahron is elated with the decision. "Ahron is going to greet you with joy in is heart!" (Exodus 4:14). There are no more protestations. Moshe journeys back to Egypt and into eternity. The question is obvious. What did Moshe finally say that inflamed the ire of Hashem to the extent that the Torah tells us that His "anger burned"? Hashem responded calmly to each of Moshe's previous justifiable issues. Why did Hashem only become angry when Moshe evoked the concept of using Ahron, the one who normally and previously did the prophesizing?

As a result of lower-level mismanagement, poor earnings, and low moral, the Board of Directors dismissed the CEO of a major corporation who had served faithfully and successfully for many years. His wisdom and experience, however, were well respected in the industry and the new boss looked to the former executive for introductory advice.

"I can't tell you much," said the seasoned executive, "but I will give you something." The older boss, handed the neophyte executive two envelopes. One of them had a large#1 written on it, the second was marked #2. "Young man," began the former CEO, "when you are challenged with your first major crisis open envelope number one. If things have not calmed down after a few days, then open envelope number two."

After a brief turnaround, things began to fall apart. Soon a crisis erupted, the employees were disgruntled, and chaos began to reign. The Board of Directors were once again looking to make major changes, and the unseasoned executive's job was on the line. As hard as the young executive tried to calm the situation, it was futile. He locked himself in his office and opened the first envelope. In small but clear typewritten letters were the words, "Blame your predecessor." He followed the advice but the results were short-lived.

The following weeks were not productive. In fact, things were getting worse. It was time for the second envelope.

The young CEO opened it. When he saw the message typed on the small piece of paper, he knew his time had come. It read, "prepare two envelopes."

The Bechor Shor explains that as long as Moshe's hesitations engendered reasons that entailed his own perceived shortcomings, Hashem responded with a clear and precise rebuttal. But when Moshe exclaimed, "send the one who used to go," and did once again not offer any reason for his own failing but shifted the responsibility to his brother Ahron, Hashem became upset. And at that point, "the rage of Hashem burned against Moshe."

When challenged with difficult tasks we must face the mission presented to us and deal with our own abilities. By shifting the responsibility to someone else, even if we feel he is better suited, we may be inviting wrath. Because when we are asked by Hashem to perform, then there is no one better to do the job.

Dedicated in honor of Tom Raskin

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The Big Picture
Rabbi Ahron Lopiansky

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

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

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

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

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

Hashem replied that in order to understand the God that is ready to redeem them, they must first relearn what G-d is all about. Their "Elokim" model pictured Hashem as a more-powerful, or even all-powerful, entity, but one for whom, any period of "inactivity" would

indicate a shortcoming. If the all-powerful is inactive, he either can't or won't act.
But the real essence of Hashem, is "Y-H-W-H", which means "Was, Is, and Will Be." Hashem transcends time, and to begin to understand Hashem one must be able see the entire picture over a long span of time. Just as a two-dimensional picture (e.g. an X-ray) cannot do justice to a three dimensional object, and just as a single image cannot do justice to an entire movie, so too, man's chronologically segmented grasp of events doesn't properly appreciate and capture Hashem's Providence. If anything one sees a distortion. A farmer who plants a seed, watches it disintegrate, and sees nothing happen all winter, could be mighty disappointed if he lacks the knowledge and foresight to know what will happen in the spring. It is only when we can see all the events in a long sequence that we understand. It is the past, present, and future combined that may yield a more complete understanding of Hashem's hashgacha.
Hashem therefore told Moshe, "Klal Yisroel has knowledge of the past, i.e. the God of their forefathers. They must add the "Eh-keh", i.e. the understanding of the future. Only when they will be able to see the entire continuum in one fell swoop, will they be able to perceive Hashem's providence and benevolence which is to be found even in the present!

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Shemot: Part-Time Slaves
Ben-Tzion Spitz
Slavery is a weed that grows on every soil. - Edmund Burke
It is a biblical command for the Jewish people to remember the slavery we endured in Egypt and the subsequent miraculous exodus from the bondage of Egypt. Though history has shown that there are different degrees of slavery, the Jewish tradition is that Egyptian slavery was particularly cruel.
Based on that tradition, Egyptian slavery has been depicted widely in both books and film to the extent that we can readily imagine our ancestors plodding in the mud pits, under the harsh Egyptian sun, and the harsher taskmaster's whip, as permanent prisoners of a tyrannical regime.
However, the Bechor Shor on Exodus 1:11 adds some nuance to the terms of enslavement that may not have been apparent to us. He explains that the enslavement was not constant but rather lasted for a few months at a time. He picks up on the parallel description of the much later "enslavement" which King Solomon decreed for the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem. King Solomon "taxed" the people, taking 30,000 men who would work for the king for a month, and then they would return home for two months, though we have no record that it was a particularly harsh situation for the conscripted men.
In a related vein, the Bechor Shor explains, the Egyptians forced the Jews into hard labor for several months at a time, and then let them go home to their families for a period, so they can support their own households until they were forced into hard labor again for a number of months. This is a cycle that continued for the long decades of Egyptian bondage. In the Egyptian case, even though the Jewish slaves had some "time off" it was still an extremely oppressive and dispiriting situation.
May we be cautious of the servitudes we get ourselves into – even if they're not full-time.
Dedication - In honor of our nephew, Mordechai Tzvi Kahen's Bar-Mitzvah. Mazal Tov!
Shabbat Shalom
Ben-Tzion Spitz is a former Chief Rabbi of Uruguay. He is the author of three books of Biblical Fiction and over 600 articles and stories dealing with biblical themes.

Bs"d Parashat Shemot 5781
An Unglamorous Leader
Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz
Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz, Rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites
This week, we begin reading the book of Exodus and we enter a world different from the one in the book of Genesis. The Jewish nation has settled in Egypt and has grown to the point of seeming like a threat to Egyptian rule. The king of Egypt consults with his advisors and makes a fateful decision: to enslave the Jewish nation and embitter their lives.
The enslavement does not suffice with hard labor in construction and fieldwork. It also includes radical ideas about thinning out the population: "And Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying, 'Every son who is born you shall cast into the Nile, and every daughter you shall allow to live'" (Exodus 1, 22).
And then redemption arises from this darkness. A baby is born to a known family, and after three months of hiding him, the desperate mother puts him in a cradle on the banks of the Nile river. King Pharaoh's daughter goes to bathe in the river, finds the baby, and adopts him. The boy, named Moses, grows up in the palace of the Egyptian king. Later, Moses gets into trouble after killing an Egyptian who was abusing and hitting a Jew. He is forced to escape from Egypt and arrives in Midian where he marries Zipporah, has two sons with her, and settles there.
But Moses' destiny was not to live a peaceful life in Midian. The Divine plan changed his life. One day, Moses was shepherding his father-in-law's herd when G-d revealed Himself to Moses from within a burning bush, telling him to return to Egypt and represent the Jewish nation before Pharaoh ahead of their liberation and exodus from Egypt.
Moses does not accept the job easily. He tried to argue and refuse it five times, offering a different excuse each time for why he was unsuitable for the job and why his mission was bound to fail. Let us focus on his fourth refusal when Moses made the following persuasive claim:
Moses said to the Lord, "I beseech You, O Lord. I am not a man of words, neither from yesterday nor from the day before yesterday, nor from the time You have spoken to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue." (Ibid 4, 10)
This is actually a significant claim. Moses did not have rhetorical skills and even suffered from some kind of speech impediment making his speech unclear. This disability, Moses claimed, was significant enough to make him unsuitable for the job he was being told to do. One of the skills a leader needs is the ability to make speeches and persuade the masses, and this was something he felt he could not do.
G-d's answer was clear-cut:
But the Lord said to him, "Who gave man a mouth, or who makes [one] dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? So now, go! I will be with your mouth, and I will instruct you what you shall speak." (Ibid Ibid, 11-12)
Reading G-d's answer, it seems that He did not promise Moses that his speech impediment would disappear. There was no imminent miracle. Moses would get G-d's help, and he would be able to speak before Pharaoh and the nation and deliver His words, but he would remain inarticulate.
This begets the questions – Why wasn't this handled differently? Why was Moses taking on the leadership position with this speech impediment? The Ran, Rabbi Nissim of Gerona, a Spanish sage of the 14th century, explained that had Moses been an articulate speaker, skeptics could claim that the Jewish people accepted the Torah only as a result of Moses' charisma. But since it was actually difficult to listen to Moses, it was clear that we did not accept the Torah because we were impressed by Moses.
There are dangers inherent in rhetorical skill. A leader with outstanding speaking skills can persuade the masses to follow him even if the content of his words is not necessarily true. Moses, as leader of the nation, carried no external glamor so that when the Torah would be given by him later on, it would not be accepted by the nation because they were carried away by momentary enthusiasm.
The Torah had to be received in a state of composure, with consideration and understanding of its significance. For Divine truth to be taken to heart by people, it had to be devoid of external glamor. Truth has to be clear from content, not presentation.
A person interested in investing and advancing in Torah learning and fulfilling commandments must be prepared for the fact that Judaism does not always look outwardly glamorous. Satisfaction and joy come

when the focus is primarily on content and not on how things look or sound. Investing in our internal world is the correct and better choice
The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah
The Prayer of Chanina ben Dosa
Chanan Morrison

The first-century sage Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai was deeply troubled. His son was seriously ill. When the child's condition became life-threatening, the rabbi turned to one of his students, known for his piety and ability to perform miracles: Chanina ben Dosa.

"Chanina, pray for my son so that he may live!"

Chanina ben Dosa promptly placed his head between his knees and prayed for God's mercy. And the boy recovered.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai remarked to his wife: "If I were to place my head between my knees all day long, it would not have made a difference."

The rabbi's wife was surprised. "What? Is Chanina greater than you?"

"No," replied Rabbi Yochanan. "But he is like a servant before the King, while I am a minister before the King." (Berachot 34b)

What is the difference between the king's servant and his minister?

And why was Chanina ben Dosa's prayer more efficacious than the prayer of an eminent scholar like Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai?

Service of the Mind and Service of the Heart

In general, we have two paths to serve God. The first path is to use our intellectual faculties to contemplate and follow the ways of God.

The second path relies on the heart. It is based on our innate disposition towards kindness and holiness.

Both are valid ways to serve God, whether we are guided by the intellect's truth, or by our innate sense of goodness and purity.

Those whose path is an intellectual service must concentrate their efforts on studying and internalizing true knowledge of God's ways. Prayer, on the other hand, primarily engages the emotions and contributes less to the path of intellectual spiritual growth.

But for those who choose the path of the heart, prayer is key in refining and uplifting their service. Their prayers are more likely to be accepted, as Divine providence assists and completes us in the path that we have chosen. As the Sages taught in Makkot 10b, "According to the path that one wishes to follow, one will be directed."

The service of the mind is loftier than that of the heart, just as the intellect is a higher faculty, above the emotions. Nonetheless, prayer will be more effective for those who have chosen the path of feelings of holiness. Those who seek to elevate their spirits through an outpouring of prayer will experience a natural sense of closeness to God.

The Servant and the Minister

Now we may understand Rabbi Yochanan's response to his wife. His student Chanina ben Dosa was like a servant before the King. Chanina's service was based on holy and pure emotions. He performed God's will like a faithful servant, without questioning or deeper understanding. And his sincere prayers, straight from the heart, suited his spiritual service.

Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, on the other hand, was a great scholar. He was like a minister to the King. His service was a lofty path, the service of Torah wisdom and scholarship. For one accustomed to this higher service, the emotional service of prayer is a descent; it is less central for this spiritual path.

Perhaps that is the significance of the Talmud's description of Chanina ben Dosa's prayer: "he lowered his head between his knees." This position indicates a service of God in which the intellect takes a backseat. The head is lowered, while the heart and its emotions take center stage.

(Adapted from preface to Olat Re'iyah vol. I p. 27; Ein Eyah vol. I p. 166)

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parshas Shemos
פרשת שמות תשפ"א

ותיראן המילדות את האלקים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן מלך מצרים

And the midwives feared G-d; they did not do as the King of Egypt told them. (1:17)

The Torah lauds the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, for defying Pharaoh's diabolical decree, maintaining that their inner strength and courage were the product of their profound *yiraas Elokim*, fear of G-d. Two weak, defenseless women stood up to the most powerful despotic ruler in the world and refused to murder the Jewish infants. True, they gave excuses, but anyone with a modicum of intelligence knew that what they claimed could not have been true all the time. Their *yiraas Shomayim*, fear of Heaven, knowing fully-well that Hashem is above everyone and no excuses or mitigating, extenuating circumstances can rationalize transgression guided them. It is either permissible or it is prohibited. There is no gray area. *Elokim* is Hashem's Name connoting Strict Justice – which means exactly what it reads: strict, unembellished, unvarnished justice.

What, indeed, is the essence of *yiraas Shomayim* that grants a person the strength to overcome all obstacles and stand up to all challenges? *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, quotes the *pesukim* in *Yeshayah* (51:12,13), *Mi at va'tiri mei'enosh yamus u'miben adam chatzir yinasein. Va'tishkach Hashem oseich noteh shomayim v'yoseid eretz*, "Who are you that you fear from mortals and from men who will be made as grass? You have forgotten Hashem, your Maker, Who spread out the heavens and set the foundation of the earth. The *Navi* says clearly that a person can only be afraid of another human being if he has *chas v'shalom*, Heaven forbid, forgotten *Hashem Yisborach.* To the contrary, the only way a person can stand fearless before <u>any</u> human being, regardless of his position/station in life, his power and ruthlessness, is if he possesses a strong, uncompromised sense of *yiraas Shomayim*. One who fears Hashem – fears no man. One whose fear of Hashem is deficient – has no limits to whom and what he fears.

To define *yiraas Shomayim*, I would suggest that a person who truly fears Hashem feels His immediacy at all times. Some people are observant and very committed, but do they feel Hashem's Presence in their lives at all times? When the *Gerrer Rebbe*, the *Imrei Emes*, arrived in Vienna in 1923 to attend the *Knessiah Gedolah,* he remained outside the hall, refusing to enter. His *gabbaim*, attendants, explained to the event organizers that the *Rebbe* had issues with the *mechitzah*, separation between men and women. Although the women were seated in the balcony which surrounded the entire room, there were no curtains. Thus, anyone who looked up saw the women. This, as far as the *Rebbe* was concerned, was a breach of Jewish law. He would not enter the room until the breach had been corrected.

When a group of *rabbanim* heard about the *Rebbe's* "stringency," they disagreed; they felt the *mechitzah* was fine and did not require repair. The consensus of opinion ruled that they would ask the *Chafetz Chaim, zl*, who also happened to be attending the conference. They would all abide by his ruling. The sage replied, "According to *halachah*, Jewish law, the *mechitzah* is kosher and does not require any alteration. However, since some Jews have requested an 'upgrade', we should acquiesce to their demands."

He continued with this reasoning (as quoted by *Horav Elimelech Biderman, Shlita*), "When Hashem is with us, we have <u>nothing</u> to fear. David *Hamelech* states in *Tehillim* 23, 'Even when I go in the valley of death, I have no fear… because You are with me.' However, when Hashem's Presence is not with us, we are in grave danger. When there is a lack of *tznius* (moral modesty, chastity), Hashem removes His Presence from within our midst. It is, thus, to our benefit to be *machmir*, stringent, in matters of *kedushah*, holiness, and *tznius*. It will catalyze a higher level of protection and *siyata diShmaya,* Divine assistance." These *gedolim* felt Hashem's Presence in their midst and realized the consequences that relaxing a stringency might catalyze.

The *Chafetz Chaim* was wont to say, *Der velt zogt az mir zol zein frum, un frum un klug*. (G-d-fearing, G-d-fearing and wise). *Ich zog, az mir zol zein klug, un klug, un frum*, "The world says that one should be G-d-fearing and wise, I say that he should be wise and G-d-fearing." (In other words, wisdom should precede his observance, because a person should have sufficient common sense and acumen to determine

when it is appropriate to be stringent, upon whose shoulders one is imposing his stringency, and at what expense. Every issue must be carefully weighed and decided appropriately in such a manner that no one is offended. Obviously, this applies only with regard to a stringency. When it involves normative *halachah*, we have no room for compromise. There are no gray areas.)

בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת וילדו

Before the midwife comes to them, they have given birth. (1:19)

The midwives explained to Pharaoh that the Jewish women were unique in that they gave birth even prior to the arrival of the midwife. Thus, the midwives were powerless to prevent the male infants from entering the world. Certainly, Pharaoh did not want them to commit a wanton act of murder. *Horav Ovadia Yosef, zl,* related the following incredible incident. One *Erev Pesach*, a young father who lived on a *Moshav* south of Yerushalayim came to him with a six-year old boy.

"*Kavod Horav*, will the *Chacham* bless my son? After all, he was born because of 'you,'" the young father explained. (There are quotes on "you" for a reason, to be explained in the course of the story.)

"In 1998 (four years after *Rabbanit* Margalit Yosef had returned her soul to its holy source), I was asked to conduct the *Pesach Seder* at an absorption center. Many of the new *olim*, emigres, were experiencing Judaism for the first time. The *Seder* would be, for many of them, their segue into traditional Judaism. I agreed to lead the *Seder* and make use of this opportunity to reach out to the attendees to bring them closer to the religion of their forebears. Shortly before the *chag,* festival, was to begin, my wife felt that her pregnancy was coming to its conclusion and she must go to the hospital. Imagine, arriving at the hospital to be informed that due to the upcoming festival, all the midwives had left for *chofesh*, vacation, to spend time with their respective families. There was, however, one midwife on staff who was present to cover any emergencies. If my wife could 'wait' a little, while the midwife attended to another patient, she would soon be in to help her.

"When my wife saw that it would be some time before she would be attended to, she asked me to leave and attend the *Seder* for the *olim: 'B'ezras Hashem*, with the help of the Almighty, in the merit of the *mitzvah* that you will perform, I will get through this without mishap, and it will be a *mazel tov* for us.' With tears in my eyes, I left my wife to lead the *Seder*. It pained me greatly to leave her alone in the hospital, but how could I ignore the three hundred *olim* who were waiting to hear the *d'var Hashem*?

"Understandably, following the *Seder*, I returned to my wife to learn of the *mazel tov*, birth of our son, who stands with me here today. My wife told me that she had an intriguing experience while I was gone. She lay there alone in the room, happy that I was performing a *mitzvah*, but nervous and afraid, when suddenly a woman stood before her, dressed all in white, similar to that worn by the nurses. She said to her, 'Listen to me. My name is Margalit. I am the wife of *Horav* Ovadia Yosef. I come to you from Heaven to assist and be with you. Do not be afraid; do not worry. I will be with you the entire time.' Within a few moments, my wife gave birth and the (*neshamah* of) *Rabbanit* disappeared." (The reader now knows why there were quotes on "you.") When the story was related to *Horav Chaim Kanievesky, Shlita*, he said that he believed the story. In the merit of the *mitzvah* and in the merit of the woman's *mesiras nefesh*, dedication to the point of self-sacrifice, Hashem did something *l'maaleh min ha'teva*, supernaturally, to help the woman. She deserved it.

ותרד בת פרעה לרחץ על היאר

Pharoah's daughter went down to bathe by the river. (2:5)

The *Baal HaTurim* writes that the last letters of *va'teired bas* Pharaoh – *daled, saf, hay,* spell *dassah*, her religion. This teaches us that Bisyah, daughter of Pharaoh, was not taking a random trip down to the river. She went there to immerse herself as her concluding step toward converting to Judaism. This comment is already stated in the *Talmud* (*Sotah* 12b), "She went down to the river to wash herself off from her father's idols." *Horav Gamliel Rabinowitz, Shlita*, asks an intriguing question. Of all times to join the Jewish People, this was not the most propitious. No people were more reviled in Egypt than the Jews. They were treated as parasites and enslaved. Their lives were meaningless to the Egyptians, who persecuted and murdered them, first at random, and later in a systematic process to destroy them physically and emotionally. Why would Bisyah decide now, of all times, to join this downtrodden, rejected nation?

Rav Gamliel explains that it all depends on one's perspective. How one views an incident determines how he will experience it. In his commentary to *Va'yaar b'sivlosam*, "And (he) observed their burdens" (2:11), *Rashi* comments: "Moshe *Rabbeinu* went out to see the suffering of his brethren and grieve with them." He identified with the Jewish People. Although he was raised in Pharoah's palace, an environment that bespoke anti-Semitism, he retained his pedigree and remained committed to the heritage of his parents, Amram and Yocheved. By identifying with the pain experienced by the Jews, Moshe became one with them. Likewise, Bisyah ruminated over the fact that the Jews were the target of such vicious animus. Why the Jews? It must be that their values, way of life, and religious conviction posed a threat to the pagan, hedonistic culture that characterized Egypt. The average Egyptian viewed the downtrodden Jews as dismal failures, pathetic examples of human deficiency. Why would they want to have anything to do with them? Not so Bisyah, whose perspective was like Moshe's – empathetic, profound, intelligent. The Egyptians must have had a reason to single out *Klal Yisrael* as the subject of such treachery. Rather than simply being punished, they were being refined, much like gold in a crucible. Egypt was the crucible for purifying and refining the Jewish nation, and from there it will emerge to distinction – both spiritual and material. She wanted to be a part of this nation. She sought to share in their greatness.

Rav Gamliel relates that he spoke to a Jew who is fully observant, who claimed that the suffering he witnessed during the Holocaust inspired his current level of observance. Prior to the war, he was a free-thinking, assimilated Jew, who maintained no belief in Hashem, His Torah or *mitzvos*. This transition was actually an anomaly, since it was increasingly more common for one's questions *vis-à-vis* the Holocaust to catalyze a rejection of the faith, rather than motivate return and embrace. The man explained with an analogy that allowed him to see the light: "A young child who was brought to *shul* was disturbing the congregation. Unable to read and bored, he reacted to being cooped up with a bunch of "old" men who were *davening*. The members of the congregation did not like being disturbed, so they responded in the usual manner, by "shushing" and motioning to him to be quiet. At times, their patience wore thin, but, one thing was certain, no one would lift a finger to the child – except for his father. When the father saw that all the signals and warnings failed to quiet his son, he lifted his hand and administered corporal punishment. Certainly, this was not out of a lack of love, but rather, out of a sense of responsibility, because he loved his child and wanted to see him develop into a fine, upstanding, fully-observant *ben Torah*. The slap was an expression of love and care – not animus – or lack of control. Likewise, the discipline to which we are privy is a demonstration of our Father in Heaven's love for His children. Evidently, we are not all able to see or sense this phenomenon. When you think about it, do all children recognize and acknowledge that their parent's discipline is an expression of love? It demands maturity and even a little empathy, whereby the child imagines that he/she was the parent who was compelled to address their child's present behavior, and to "modulate/tweak" its course so that the future they all hope for would be realized.

Rav Gamliel sums it up: For every event experienced both by the communal *Klal Yisrael* or the individual Jew, if he/they apply their heart and eyes to it (in other words, they think rationally, with common sense, empathy and an open mind), it will have a positive effect in catalyzing a better Jew and a better nation. One who expands his mind and thinks will soon see how much Hashem loves him/us. Troubles should not turn us away from Hashem; on the contrary, they should bring us closer, because it shows that He cares.

ויאנחנו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם אל האלקים... וישמע... ויזכר אלקים את בריתו את אברהם את יצחק ואת יעקב

And *Bnei Yisrael* groaned from the labor, and they cried out, and their outcry rose up to G-d… and G-d heard… and G-d remembered His covenant with Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. (2:23,24)

The Jews had been suffering for years from the back-breaking labor forced upon them by the Egyptians. They must have cried, groaned and moaned before. Now, the covenant with the Patriarchs came into play. This was not a new covenant. It had been around for quite some time. Why now? What change transpired that now, after all this time, Hashem listened, remembered and responded to these pleas? *Horav Yisrael Belsky, zl*, recounts from a *Shabbos Shuvah drashah*, lecture, rendered by *Horav Yonasan Shteif, zl*, that responds to this question.

Golus comes in two forms: physical and spiritual. Physical bondage is physically painful, causes deep anxiety and depresses a person, as he sees life and hope diminishing every day. Spiritual exile requires a deeper sense of self and one's spiritual needs in order to feel the spiritual angst that overwhelms a person as he feels his relationship with Hashem waning with each passing day. To put this into perspective, I suggest that we each ask ourselves how we felt locked in our homes as the Covid virus raged. No *shuls*, no *bais hamedrash*, with *shiurim* on the phone. The first time that we were allowed back into *shul* to *daven* with a *minyan* was exhilarating. Imagine, living like this in an oppressive country, where Jewish religious observance is punishable by death or life in Siberia – which is the same. This is spiritual bondage. In order for it to be considered exile, however, one must feel that he is missing something, that he is being deprived of life itself. If he feels no loss, then it is not much of an exile.

It is natural to complain when one is in pain. When one is suffering, anxiety and depression are to be expected. Thus, when *Klal Yisrael* first began to cry out, it was tears inspired by pain – the pain of physical deprivation. The labor was overwhelming, backbreaking work that produced absolutely nothing. Physical pain, anxiety and demoralizing labor will destroy a person. So they reacted with tears. Hashem heard them, but waited patiently, because the *golus*, exile, would eventually come to an end. The Jewish People would outlast and outlive the Egyptians. Their suffering would come to an end. Hashem had promised this to the *Avos*, Patriarchs. It was like engraved in stone. So what had changed?

During the many (210) years of miserable suffering, the cries had subtly changed. The people began to realize and finally acknowledge that physical pain was not the worst that one could experience, as long as he was not alone. When one comes to the horrible realization that, with time and increasing pain, his relationship with Hashem, his sanctity, was slowly diminishing, and, if things were to continue in this manner he would have nothing – neither body nor soul; he had reached the end of the line. The inexorable toll that the hard labor was taking on their emotions and ability to think and connect with Hashem was destroying their Jewishness, without which they were nothing. Now, they had serious reasons for crying. The physical pain was destroying them spiritually.

This is what they cried about – now. The last vestiges of their closeness to Hashem was quickly dissipating. If Hashem would not listen to them, they were finished. It was crunch time. This is why Hashem remembered His covenant with the *Avos*, which is the root of our eternal connection with Hashem. The Almighty saw that we were in danger of losing that connection; the twines of the "rope" that connected us to Him were tearing, one by one. Without the *kedushah*, sanctity, of being *Bnei Avraham, Yitzchak, v'Yaakov* – what makes us distinct? It is what exemplifies us and discerns us. In the merit of this heightened awareness which was (sadly) inspired by their suffering, Hashem hastened the redemption and liberated them from the Egyptian bondage.

Perhaps the greatest exile is when one does not know that he is in exile and begins treating his dismal circumstances as the "new" way of life. I was just learning with someone who had once been observant. "Life," "situations," "environment" all took their toll on his spiritual development. Soon after completing his *yeshivah* high school education, his religious trajectory changed directions, and today he is far from his original destination. Obviously, his children and grandchildren were never introduced to, or indoctrinated in, his "original" way of life and are today very distant from Torah and *mitzvos*. I asked my friend if he has, over the years, talked to his grandchildren about his parents, who were Holocaust survivors, and whether he has touched on the Holocaust and the spiritual heroism manifest by our brothers and sisters. His response troubled me: "I am not permitted to mention anything negative to my grandchildren. In fact, when they conduct a *Pesach* '*Seder,'* I have to gloss quickly over *Makas Bechoros*, killing of the firstborn Egyptians, because it implies negativity and sadness." This is my understanding of spiritual exile, when one does not even understand what is happening, when Hashem speaks to us and no one is listening – because it might project negativity.

What keeps us going? Only our connection to Hashem allows us to maintain our fortitude in the face of the most horrific challenges. A well-known story concerning the saintly *Horav Meir, zl, m'Premishlan,* was often related by the holy *Kaliver Rebbe, zl. Rav* Meir used to immerse himself in a *mikvah* situated on top of a snow covered mountain. Despite his advanced age, *Rav* Meir clambered up the mountain without help. The man who accompanied the *Rebbe* was much younger than he, yet he slipped and fell with almost every step. He asked the *Rebbe*, "How is it that Your Honor walks up so steadily, while I am constantly stumbling?" The *Rebbe* replied, "He who is bound to the One Above will not fall below."

We each have our own unique "cord" for connecting with Hashem. Our nation has survived throughout the millennia because we never let go. The holy *Berdichever Rebbe, zl, Horav* Levi Yitzchak, would declare in his *Erev Yom Kippur drashah*, "*Ribono Shel Olam*! To build a building, iron, stone and water are needed. If You need iron to build the Third *Bais Hamikdash*, we are iron, since we have continued our commitment throughout time, despite a sea of troubles. If You need stones, how many Jewish hearts have slowly turned to stone because of all their troubles and suffering? If You need water, you have plenty of it in the endless tears of *Klal Yisrael*."

We each have our own way of holding on.

Va'ani Tefillah

שים שלום – *Sim shalom*

Establish peace.

Shalom, peace; *shleimus*, wholeness, perfection: Two words that are actually one. True peace is *shleimus*, perfection. It is an absolute similar to truth; it is either perfect or it is not peaceful. Flawed peace is not peace; it is nothing. As *Horav Avigdor Miller, zl*, says, "Peace is a wondrous contrivance, for peace requires countless thousands of factors which must participate and which must function perfectly; and if one factor would be lacking or would malfunction, there would be no peace." Thus, we conclude *Shemoneh Esrai* with the blessing of *shalom*. Furthermore, when we have peace, it does not just happen. Hashem contrived peace as a creation that represents ultimate inclusiveness and kindliness. *Rav* Miller observes that when blessing follows adversity, everyone notices and thanks Hashem. What about when nothing transpires, there is no enemy, and people "just happen" to live in harmony with tranquility reigning throughout? People often make the mistake of thinking that peace does not need a Supreme Motivator and that tranquility is not a positive gift, but merely a lack of misfortune. As believing Jews, we know that nothing "just happens." Peace is no different. Without Hashem's intervention, peace, like everything else, would be nothing more than an elusive dream.

לע"נ האשה החשובה

רבקה טובא דבורה בת ר' חיים יוסף מאיר ע"ה - נפ' כ"א טבת התש"ס - ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

In memory of Mrs. Toby Salamon ע"ה

נדבת מנחם שמואל ורויא דבורה סלומון

prepared and edited by Rabbi L. Scheinbaum

לע"נ
שרה משא בת ר' יעקב אליעזר ע"ה
ביילא בת (אריה) לייב ע"ה

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SEFER SHMOT - Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

A TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAN'S APPROACH - GALUT & GEULAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM BREISHIT TO SHMOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b'hatzlacha!
menachem

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INTRO PART II /

For Parshat Shmot

USING OUTLINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUILDING UP TO THE BURNING BUSH

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

Let's explain how and why:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. INTRODUCTION

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

II. THE MISSION

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

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

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

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

Let's explain:

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

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

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

GOD'S MESSAGE AT THE SNEH

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

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

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

Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

PARSHAT SHMOT Let My People Go

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

PART ONE

FREEDOM OF RELIGION or FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY

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

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

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

MOSHE'S REQUEST FROM PHARAOH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEGOTIATIONS & MORE NEGOTIATIONS

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

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

ROUND ONE:

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

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

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

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

ROUND TWO:

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

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

ROUND THREE:

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

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

EVEN AFTER THE TENTH PLAGUE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAST 'TRICK'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surely, this interpretation raises many questions.

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

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

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

LET MY PEOPLE GO - PART TWO

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

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

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

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RASHI - 'FOR WHAT PURPOSE'!

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

RASHBAM - 'HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE'!

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

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

THE FIRST HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

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

THE SECOND HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'NOT SO FAST ...'

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

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

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

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

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

NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEEPING A SECRET

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

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

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

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO PERSPECTIVES

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

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

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

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

FROM MAKKOT TO DIBROT

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here is a brief survey of some other explanations offered:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parshas Shemos: The Selection of Mosheh

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. WHY MOSHEH?

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

WHY THE REPETITION?

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

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

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

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

WHY DIPLOMACY?

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

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE EXODUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. "THESE ARE THE NAMES"

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

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

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

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

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

IV. "VAYISH'R'TZU"

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

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

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

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

V. "LET US DEAL WISELY"

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

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

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

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

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

Once the Egyptians saw that these descendants of political and spiritual giants, (and of their former viceroy), were willing

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

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

VI. "Hashem IS JUST AND I AM WICKED"

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

A lack of dignity

A self-induced subjugation to Pharaoh and Egyptian culture

Continued tribalism

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

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

VII. ENTER MOSHEH

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIII. THE UNDERCURRENT OF B'RESHEET: FRACTURED BROTHERHOOD

Throughout Sefer B'resheet, we find a common story line regarding family relationships. The younger brother is favored over the older brother - and neither brother is comfortable with that outcome.

We first meet Kayyin and Hevel (Chapter 4), where the reaction (fratricide) is the most extreme. God favors Hevel's offering - and Kayyin kills him in response.

Next, we meet Yishma'el and Yitzchak (Chapter 21). Although Yishma'el doesn't attack Yitzchak, we never find a rapprochement between the two. The only time they meet again is at their father's burial.

We then meet Esav and Ya'akov (Chapters 25-35). Even though Esav threatens to kill Ya'akov (which fits with Esav's

impetuous nature), they are eventually reconciled - after which they go their separate ways.

Next come Yoseph and his brothers (Chapters 37-50) - surely the most developed and complex fraternal relationship(s) in B'resheet. In this case, the brothers are eventually reconciled and stay together.

Fittingly, Sefer B'resheet ends with another younger-older scene, depicting the favoring of Ephraim over M'nasheh (Chapter 48). We are given no information about either one's reaction to grandfather's blessing - and it seems that things are improving in this vein as time goes on.

IX. MOSHEH, AHARON AND MIRIAM - WORKING TOGETHER

Now, at the beginning of Sh'mot, we are introduced to Mosheh. He is clearly favored by his parents, as he is described as "good" at his birth, they make every effort to shield him and then, relying on some form of divine intervention, send him down the Nile. His older brother and sister have every reason to be jealous (following the B'resheet model - and the present state of the inter-tribal relations) - yet his sister (who is mentioned but not even named in the second chapter) looks after him and ensures his safety and continued relationship with family. When Mosheh is finally sent by God to Pharaoh, he refuses unless his older brother is included in the mission. God tells him that Aharon will rejoice upon seeing him (4:14) - and, as the commentators explain, he would rejoice over Mosheh's selection as God's messenger and not harbor any jealousy.

For his part, Mosheh includes both of his older siblings in the exodus and leadership of the people. Aharon is one of his right-hand men (Sh'mot 24:14) and Miriam leads the women (15:20).

Mosheh, Aharon and Miriam have finally corrected the tragic and destructive history of sibling rivalry - which is what got us to Egypt in the first place (Yoseph being sold by his brothers).

This only serves to underscore the enormity of the tragedy when Mosheh's leadership begins to unravel (see Bamidbar 12). It only happens when Aharon and Miriam speak ill of Mosheh, exhibiting jealousy over his unique relationship with God. Even the family which led us from slavery to freedom and to an appreciation of our own great mission couldn't fully escape the legacy of B'resheet.

Parshat Shemot: Slavery's Racist Roots

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION FOR PARASHAT SHEMOT:

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

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

3. MOSHE:

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

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

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

PARASHAT SHEMOT:

AND THEY ALL DIED:

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

SHEMOT 1:1-7 --

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

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

1) Yosef, all of his brothers, and all of his generation are dead. In other words, all of the people we had been "depending on" for leadership, the mention of whose names had lulled us into believing for a moment that they were still here to lead,

are gone. The family of seventy is left without a leader and no one appears to fill that vacuum. A crisis of leadership is brewing.

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

A BREWING CRISIS:

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

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

OMINOUS SIGNS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHO'S AT THE HELM?

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

EGYPTIAN FEARS:

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

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

enemies, fight us, and go up out of the land!"

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

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY?

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

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

AN INFERIOR PEOPLE:

Rashbam (and perhaps Abravanel and other mefarshim) implies that even before the Egyptians officially enslave Bnei Yisrael, they already look at Bnei Yisrael as either cheap labor or a potential source of slave labor. The Egyptians fear that this source of labor may one day develop feelings of independence and decide to leave Egypt. That the Egyptians look at Bnei Yisrael as potential slaves fits well with the hints we have mentioned that the Egyptians consider Bnei Yisrael a lower class: they refuse to share a table with members of Bnei Yisrael and consider Bnei Yisrael's traditional and current occupation an abomination.

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

DEHUMANIZATION: INSECTS AND VERMIN

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

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

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

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

POPULATION CONTROL BEGINS:

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

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

JUST LIKE ANIMALS:

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

SHEMOT 1:19 --

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

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

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

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

A NATION OF KILLERS:

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

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

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

"RIGHTEOUS GENTILES":

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

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

A LEADER APPEARS:

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

Shabbat Shalom

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'etre. 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.

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

UPDATE: Learning to live with COVID-19

We will be treating COVID-19 for some time as we continue to fight this pandemic during the implementation of vaccines. Data and experience gained since the outbreak of the disease are improving measures taken to prevent, diagnose, and treat it at different stages. A panel of experts will discuss

- **The main signs of COVID-19 and the various tests used to identify and treat it**
- **Changes in treatments over the past 10 months and what lays ahead**
- **How children are affected by the virus and how they spread it**
- **What researchers are discovering about early markers of COVID-19 and its after-effects**

Speakers:

- Ronald Reisler, MD/MPH, *infectious diseases, clinical research, Davis Defense Group*
- Yosefta Hefter, MD, *pediatrician, Pediatric Infectious Diseases Fellow at Children's National Hospital*
- Evan Fisher, MD, *internist/nephrologist, Wright-Patterson AFB*

Saturday, January 23, 2021
8:15 to 9:15 p.m.

Zoom ID: 878 2795 1873
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