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 more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) from www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

Special program on Sunday: The Torah and Legacy of Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel and his Ongoing Impact on the Orthodox Community on the 50th Anniversary of His Passing – Zoom meeting, Sunday, January 15, 8-10 p.m. Professor Dr. Susannah Heschel is one of the panelists for this program. Register at yctorah.org/heschel. Contributions to attend the zoom are voluntary.

Most of my recent parsha messages focus on legacy. Who in the parsha is significant, what is that person's legacy, and what can we learn as we try to build our own legacies to pass on and teach our children and grandchildren. As we move from Sefer Bereishis to Shemot, the focus turns from individuals and families to a nation, B'Nai Yisrael (a term we first encounter in 1:7). We now pride ourselves as B'Nai Yisrael, a term that connects us back to Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yisrael, our distinguished ancestors. However, Paro, the first individual to refer to us as BNai Yisrael, refers to us in terms one would normally use to describe rats and cockroaches – swarming pests who fill the land and make it disgusting (1:7-10).

In Sefer Bereishis, the most extended discussion of any generation involves that of Yaakov's children, especially Yosef. Shemot opens when that entire generation has died. Although the Torah frequently mentions members of other tribes during the sections concerning Yosef, the only Jews after Yosef's generation mentioned by name in the first sixteen chapters of Shemot are members of Moshe's immediate family. In terms I have been using, the Torah includes material helping build legacies for members of Moshe's family, but we do not see any discussion about members from other tribes until Joshua appears (with no back story) in 17:9. Other Jews alive during this generation only appear as unnamed members of B'Nai Yisrael.

During the early chapters in Sefer Shemot, the Torah provides important insights, especially regarding God, Moshe, Miriam, and Paro's daughter (Batya). Rabbi David Fohrman and his colleagues provide numerous insights about these individuals. God's message to Avraham is that the Jewish people will become like stars – too many to count – but enslaved for 400 years. While humans cannot count the stars, God can and does – every night when they come out and every morning when the sun hides them. In the same way, God knows and addresses every Jew by name, a measure of His love for each of us. Sefer Shemot is the book of our slavery and pain. However, Hashem tells Moshe that His name is "Eheyeh" – "I am who I was, who I am now, and who I always shall be." This name means that Hashem has always been with every Jew, is with us now, and always will be with us. Thus, while Sefer Shemot is the book of our suffering and pain, it is also the book expressing and reminding us that Hashem has always been with us, is with us now, and always will be with us.

As Rabbi Fohrman expresses, every animal loves its offspring. However, the love of an animal for its child does not compare to the level of love of a human parent for his or her child. Similarly, God's love for every one of us is far beyond the level that a human can comprehend. This concept, which Christians adopted two thousand years ago, is entirely new among religions. Paro and his people had seventy gods, but none of them related to humans with personal love. The concept of a loving deity is absent among pagan religions. God's name, as He expresses to Moshe, demonstrates the love available to each of us if we look for it and develop a personal relationship with Hashem.

A story from Midrash states that Batya's arm stretched far into the Nile to enable her to pull baby Moshe from his teva. Could a daughter of Paro, raised in his anti-Semitic palace, dare to retrieve a Jewish infant boy, bring him into the palace, raise him as her son, and teach him that he is Jewish and that other Jews are his brothers? Even if she wanted to do so, could she get away with going against Paro's orders? Somehow Batya was able to capture the teva, bring Moshe into the palace, defy the anti-Semitism all around, raise Moshe as a Jew among all the pagans, lead him to prefer identifying with the slave Jews rather than the wealthy Egyptian nobles, and influence Moshe to spend his adult life helping the disadvantaged and the Jewish slaves. The Rabbis from the Midrash recognized Batya's role with amazing sophistication.

Miriam, before age five or six, already convinces her parents to remarry and have another child. She has perfect faith that God will find a way to save her baby brother, even when the person discovering the teva turns out to be Paro's daughter. Miriam offers to find a Jewish nursemaid for the baby – her own mother. Her perfect faith that Hashem will find a way to save her baby brother works out in a way that no one could have predicted. Miriam's perfect faith will inspire Moshe on several occasions later in the Torah.

Early chapters in Sefer Shemot demonstrate why God selects Moshe to represent Him before Paro and take the lead in saving and teaching the Jews. Moshe is the one who sees. When he walks out in the neighborhood of the palace, he sees an Egyptian oppressing a Jewish slave. Such oppression is common, something all over the country every day. Only Moshe notices and does something about it – striking the Egyptian taskmaster (and killing him). Arriving at a watering station in Midian, Moshe is the one who sees the shepherds oppressing some women who come for water. He is the one who sees the oppression, guards them from the shepherds, and draws the water for them. While grazing with Yitro's flocks, he notices a common sight in the Midbar – a bush burning. Only Moshe, however, notices that the bush continues to burn without any sign of any part of the bush being consumed. Only Moshe notices that there is a miracle going on with the bush in question. Moshe is the one who notices important details and acts on what others would not even notice. God wants a person with these qualities – and with Avraham's chesed – to represent Him in leading B'Nai Yisrael. While we read a well known and interesting story, the qualities and actions that make Moshe, Miriam, and Batya heros is there for the careful reader. These leaders of their generation are building their legacies even while the Torah does not mention other Jews by name.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, was a child as World War II broke out, and he approached his teenage years around the time of the founding of Israel. He grew up when the Holocaust was very recent history, and he visited Israel many times, often enough to see the country grow from a third world backwater to the modern country it has become. Rabbi Cahan's parents and sister both made aliyah, and Hannah and I have many fond memories of visiting his family in Israel as well as visiting with them on occasions when they came to Potomac.

This Friday, 20 Tevet, is the seventh yahrzeit of Dov Pluznik, Dov ben Meir, z"l, a very special member of the Beth Sholom community who passed away while we were 3000 miles away. Dov lived in Israel at the time of the founding of the state. Although he was a child at the time, he retained vivid memories of the event and related his memories on several occasions. He would always chant the Haftorah at our shul on Yom Ha'atzmaut. Dov, and his wonderful widow Judy, are among the people I have most admired in our community. As we come to the story of the generation of the Exodus from Egypt and the founding of the ancient land of Israel, it is fitting that we also reach Dov Pluznik's yahrzeit and remember his contributions as a leader of the first generation of the new land of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom.

Hannah and Alan

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David

Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Reuven ben Shoshana, Yoram Ben Shoshana, Leib Dovid ben Etel, Asher Shlomo ben Ettie, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Uzi Yehuda ben Mirda Behla, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Eliav Yerachmiel ben Sara Dina, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Sharon bat Sarah, Noa Shachar bat Avigael, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, who need our prayers. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Shabbat Shalom,

Hannah & Alan

Dvar Torah: Shemos: A New Chapter in Life Begins

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5778

> *Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flock; but shepherds came and drove them off. Moses rose to their defense, and he watered their flock. When they returned to their father Reuel, he said, "How is it that you have come back so soon today?" They answered, "An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock." He said to his daughters, "Where is he then Why did you leave the man? Ask him in to break bread." Moshe consented to stay with the man, and he gave Moshe his daughter Zipporah as wife.* (Shemos 2: 16-21)

I have a theory. This may be the address to launch my thesis. Everybody makes their own Shidduch -- marriage match. Sure there are many other angels and agents involved, but the people themselves must have done something to distinguish themselves. Try it on in your own mind and see if it fits. It seems to have worked for Moshe and for Yaakov as well, at the well.

I recently heard a story from a friend. A young lady in Jerusalem was feeling desperate for a Shidduch. She really wanted to get married but nothing was happening. She went to visit Reb Chaim Kanievsky in Bnei Brak. He gave her a blessing and advised her to buy a Tallis. (A bride traditionally purchases a Tallis for her groom). She acted on his advice and went into a Seforim Store in Jerusalem to purchase a Tallis.

The saleswomen who attended to her asked her what size Tallis she was looking for. The young lady shrugged her shoulders and foolishly admitted that she did not know. "How tall is your Chosson?" She was asked. "I don't know!"was the response." The saleswomen was confused. "You don't know how tall your Chosson is?" Again the answer was shockingly "No!" But now she explained that she was following the advice of Reb Chaim.

The saleswomen was amazed and impressed that she took the words of the Reb Chaim to heart and acted upon them. She started thinking and wondering aloud in that moment. "I know a great family in Bnei Brak. They have a wonderful son. For some reason he has not found his Bashert yet. I am going to call them now and make a suggestion. I don't have to tell you how this story ends. They met and got married and she bought her Chosson a Tallis.

This story I know very well. Don't ask me how. A famous Morah teaching for more than 50 years in Queens, traveling daily from Monsey, had a marvelous and dedicated assistant one year. Once a week she would travel in with a Maggid Shiur, a big Talmud scholar. This Rabbi had been very impressed with and spent extra hours learning with a young man whose high school was in the the same place as the evening Kollel he learned in. The father of that boy had asked him to keep

his eyes open for a special girl. On one of those rides to Queens in the morning the elder Morah could not stop talking about the virtues of this girl who was her assistant. Not only was she good with the children, helpful, and cooperative in every way, but she had shown her true colors in one extraordinary episode.

The Morah came to work one day ready to go later to a wedding. She brought with her to school her bag with all of her jewelry. By the end of the day, the Morah was distressed by the realization that she could not find her bag of jewelry. Her husband had passed away years earlier, and not only was there real value to the jewels within but sentimental value that made it irreplaceable. She was beside herself. The loyal assistant looked everywhere. She spent hours after school turning over everything. She searched tirelessly but with no result. They concluded that no one would have stolen it and that it must have been accidentally swept away with the garbage. By that time the garbage had been collected and taken away by the sanitation workers and it was "too late."

This dedicated assistant would not be deterred. She called the Sanitation Department of New York and found out exactly where the garbage from this school was deposited in the Staten Island dump. It can't be pretty there, but she searched and then she found it, the jewelry bag. The Morah was amazed by her unstoppable determination and her power of empathy. She found more than the Morah's jewelry bag that day. I don't have to tell you how the story ends or how **a new chapter in life begins.**

Good Shabbos!

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5778-shemos/

A Thought on the Parsha (Shemot): Birthing a Nation

by Rabbi Dov Linzer, Rosh HaYeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2015

In an extended passage from the book of Yechezkel, the birth of the people of Israel is described through the vivid imagery of actual childbirth:

> *And as for your birth, in the day you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water to make you supple … No eye pitied you … to have compassion upon you … but you were cast into the open field … on the day that you were born. And when I passed by you, and saw you polluted in your own blood, I said unto you: Live through your blood; I said unto you: Live through your blood* (Yechezkel, 16:4–6).

Part of what makes this image so striking is the graphic, visceral reality of the infant child connected to her mother by the bloody umbilical cord, "polluted" in the blood of childbirth, awaiting that moment when the cord will be cut, the blood will be washed away, and she will begin to become a person unto herself. Along with the implicit mother birthing the child and a midwife to cut the navel and wash the child, birth, blood, and water are the key images of this passage.

These images — birth, blood, water, mother, and midwife — are central to the story of Shemot. The parasha opens with a description of the fecundity of the people: *"And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them"* (Shemot, 1:7). The small fetus of a nation had been growing and gestating in the womb of the land of Egypt, but the birth will not be easy. Pharaoh, the father, or perhaps more accurately, the step-father, is afraid of being displaced by the coming child. His first response is to impose slavery on the nation: the beginning of severe and anguishing birth pains. The phrase in Tanakh for birth pains is *chevlei leida,* travails of childbirth, from the root ch'v'l, meaning rope or bond. In English, we refer to childbirth as labor. These metaphoric bonds and labor find real-world expression in the bonds of slavery and the harsh labor that Pharaoh imposes on the people.

Pharaoh's next move is an attempt to abort the nation before it is born by killing their infant sons, whom he finds so threatening. Midwives are called in as the agents of infanticide and are told what to do when they see the infant "on the birthing stone," a hard image reflecting the life of slavery into which these children are being born. The midwives defy Pharaoh's commands and, when challenged, respond that *"the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they*

are like animals, and before the midwives come to them, they have already given birth" (1:19). Like animals, these women give birth without midwives, not on the birthing stone but — as in the image drawn by Yechezkel — alone, out in the open field.

Pharaoh does not give up. He commands his entire people to cast every newly born male child into the river, and when the fateful birth of Moshe occurs, his mother is forced to place him in a basket in the Nile. When Pharaoh's daughter discovers him, she takes him from the Nile and names him Moshe, saying, *"for I have mishitihu from the water.*" The word mishitihu is best understood not as a Hebrew word (why would Pharaoh's daughter be speaking Hebrew?), but as an Egyptian word meaning *'the son of'* (hence Ramses is Ra-meses, or the son of Ra). Pharaoh's daughter was saying, *"I have made him my son / birthed him from the water."* And, indeed, her discovery of Moshe and his subsequent naming presents quite a different depiction of birth than that of the Hebrew women. Here we have an idealized picture of birth — a woman who has given birth without blood, cramps, pain, or labor, and in fact, without pregnancy! The baby arrives already washed and swaddled. Rather than taking place on a hard "birthing stone," he has birthed into and out of the clean (and sacred) waters of the Nile. Even the labor-intensive, exhausting, bodily interactions with this baby — nursing, cleaning, and early childrearing — are done by someone else. But this idealized image of birth is not ultimately redemptive; it is the life of bodily pains, labor, breast feeding and child-rearing that ultimately brings about the birth of the nation.

A period of dormancy ensues, but after a time the urgency returns. God sees their suffering (2:25) and remembers them – *va'yizkor* (2:24), *pakod pakadeti etchem* (3:16) – just as God saw (Breishit 29:31-32) and remembered (Breishit 21:1; 30:22) our barren foremothers. God now has *"seen the oppression wherewith the Egyptians oppress them"* (3:9). The word for oppression here is *lachatz,* a word that rarely appears elsewhere and which more literally means *"pressure.*" The pressure is building up, the mother is crying out (see Yishayahu, 26:17), and the time of childbirth is almost at hand. The people will be brought out of Egypt to come into a land flowing with milk and honey (3:8, 17), imagery which evokes mothers, birth, and nurturing (see Devarim, 32:13, and Yishayahu, 7:14–15).

Moshe is dispatched to return to the people and to carry a message to Pharaoh: *"Israel is my son, even my firstborn,"* and it is this child who is about to be born. However, before this can happen, the narrative interrupts with another birth-related scene. With Moshe and family at the inn, God now seeks to kill *"him." "Him"* may refer to Moshe, but it is quite likely Moshe's son, who, like the firstborn of Egypt, is at risk. His life is saved by Tzipporah when she severs his foreskin with a rock.

The cutting of the foreskin is a pseudo-birth, and the harshness of the rock recalls the birthing stones of the midwives. It also evokes the cutting of the umbilical cord as in Yechezkel, and as in that image, the theme of blood is dominant *("a bridegroom of blood you are to me").* In fact, this is the only passage in the Torah that connects blood to the significance of the brit milah, and this is not by chance. The "childbirth" blood saves Moshe's son, possibly his firstborn, and soon a similar blood — the blood of the Paschal lamb — will save the people, God's firstborn. Marking the release of blood — whether from circumcision or sacrifice — is protective and salvific. Unlike the command to Avraham, here the mother circumcises her child rather than the father, takes control of her childbirth, and marks the release of blood, preparing the way for the final redemption.

Now, as the redemption begins, blood and water imagery come to the fore. The cleansing water of the Nile that had allowed for the bloodless childbirth of Pharaoh's daughter is smitten with the first plague, turning to blood. The unfolding process eventually climaxes with the death of the firstborn. Unlike elsewhere in the Torah, here the firstborn is particularly linked with the mother, not just the father: *"from the firstborn of Pharaoh … even unto the firstborn of the maidservant who is behind the mill"* (11:5). This becomes symbolized for future generations, when first births will be signified and sanctified through the mitzvah of redeeming the mother's firstborn child and the ritualized bloodshed of the sacrifice of firstborn animals, both described with the graphic birthing image as the *"one who opens the womb"* (13:12).

This brings us to the moment of birth. When the firstborn of Egypt are dying, the children of Israel remain protected. They are protected by the sacrificially released blood of the Pesach on their lintels and doorposts. Just as the circumcision blood saved Moshe or his child, this sacrificial blood protects them against the maschit, the destroying angel who would otherwise slay them in their homes, derailing the future redemption. Childbirth is dangerous, and mother or child may die in the process. Sometimes even God's plan requires our actions to ensure that it will be realized.

The blood on the doorframe does more than protect. It also makes the house into the womb of the nation. The door of the house is surrounded in blood just as the opening of the womb is surrounded in blood during childbirth (I thank Rabbi Dov Lerea for this point). The people will leave be pushed out of their houses, out of their protective womb, the next morning, but the birthing process will only be complete seven days later. It is then that the people will pass through the narrow straits of the split sea. It is then that they will exit the amniotic fluid, move down the birthing canal, and exit a new people on the other side. Theirs will be a birth from the soft, cleansing water. They will be washed of the blood and filth of the Egyptians, their umbilical cord will be cut, and they will be free to become a strong and independent nation.

Shabbat Shalom! [Because I did not receive Rabbi Linzer's Dvar Torah in time for my deadline, I am using one from his archives.]

Pharaoh's Daughter: Thoughts on Parashat Shemot

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Moses was raised by Pharaoh's daughter, who had saved him as a baby floating in a basket in the Nile river. Moses was nursed by his own mother, but once he was weaned he became the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses lived in the Egyptian court.

The Torah informs us that when Moses grew up "he went out to his brothers," i.e. the Israelites. How did Moses know they were his brothers? How did he identify himself as an Israelite if he had been raised as an Egyptian?

When God told Moses to go to Egypt to lead the Israelites to freedom, He told Moses that his brother Aaron would meet him and help him. How did Moses know he had a brother?

Later, when Moses assumed leadership of the Israelites, he spoke an eloquent Hebrew. When and where did he learn Hebrew?

The answer to these questions leads back to one person: Pharaoh's daughter. (The Torah never tells us her name, only identifying her as Bat Par'oh, Pharaoh's daughter.)

Bat Par'oh saved baby Moses even though she knew that Pharaoh had ordered the death of all Israelite baby boys. While this might have simply been one spontaneous act of mercy, perhaps it reflected something more about Bat Par'oh. Although an Egyptian, she felt a bond with the oppressed Israelites. Although a daughter of Pharaoh, she had humanitarian instincts that transcended her father's palace. She saved Moses not only as an act of compassion, and not only as an act of defiance against her father's cruel policies; she saved the Israelite baby boy because of her own identification with the suffering of the Israelites.

When she raised Moses, she apparently wanted him to know that he was an Israelite. She must have kept him in touch with his family members. She must have made sure he learned Hebrew…and she herself must have learned some Hebrew. When she first named him, she called him Moses; in Egyptian Mose means son. The Torah, though, gives a Hebrew derivation for the name: "ki min hamayim meshitihu," for I drew him out of the water. Scholars ask: Did Bat Par'oh actually know Hebrew? Surely she gave the baby an Egyptian name, and the Torah "Hebraized" the source of the name. But maybe Bat Par'oh actually did know Hebrew and consciously chose a name that had both Egyptian and Hebrew resonance.

Midrashic sources suggest that Bat Par'oh left Egypt with Moses when he fled to Midian. The Talmud identifies her as Bithiah, mentioned in I Chronicles 4:18; Bithiah married Mered who is identified as Caleb, one of the righteous spies (Sanhedrin 19b). Even though these identifications may be far-fetched from a historical vantage point, they underscore the essential righteousness of Bat Par'oh and her choice to become part of the Israelite people. [emphasis added]

The Torah includes just a few lines about Bat Par'oh, not even providing readers with her name. Yet, the entire exodus

story could not have happened without her heroic actions. She literally saved Moses' life as well as imbuing him with an Israelite identity. Without her, Moses would never have developed as he did.

The Torah is teaching that even seemingly minor characters can have tremendous impact on the unfolding of history. Even people whose deeds are hardly noticed, whose names we don't even know — even such people may be courageous beyond measure.

Rabbinic tradition identifies Bat Par'oh as Bithiah…a name meaning daughter of God. In effect, she wasn't a "daughter" of Pharaoh, whose policies she rejected and defied. She was indeed a daughter of God, a woman of wisdom, compassion, and remarkable heroism.

There are surely Bat Par'oh personalities in all ages, including our own. They often pass their lives in relative anonymity. Their heroic actions generally go unnoticed and unappreciated. But their quiet deeds impact powerfully on their families, societies, and the world at large.

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

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/pharaohs-daughter-thoughts-parashat-shemot

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Modern and Pre-Modern Orthodoxy

by Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

In his book, *The Perspective of Civilization,* Fernand Braudel utilizes a concept that he calls "world-time." Braudel notes that at any given point in history, all societies are not at the same level of advancement. The leading countries exist in world-time; that is, their level of advancement is correlated to the actual date in history.

However, there also are countries and civilizations which are far behind world-time, whose way of life may be centuries or even millennia behind the advanced societies. While the advanced technological countries exist in world-time, underdeveloped countries lag generations behind; some societies are still living as their ancestors did centuries ago. In short, everyone in the world may be living at the same chronological date, but different societies may be far from each other in terms of world-time.

Braudel's analysis also can be extended to the way people think. Even though people may be alive at the same time, their patterns of thinking may be separated by generations or even centuries. The characteristic of Modern Orthodoxy is that it is modern, that it is correlated to the contemporary world-time. Being part of contemporary world-time, it draws on the teachings of modern scholarship, it is open to modern philosophy and literature, and it relates Jewish law to contemporary world realities.

On the other hand, "non-modern" Orthodoxy does not operate in the present world-time. Its way of thinking and dealing with contemporary reality are pre-modern, generations behind contemporary world-time.

The differences between so-called right-wing Orthodoxy and Modern Orthodoxy are not differences in sincerity or in authentic commitment. Rather, the differences stem from different world views, from living in different world-times.

A Modern Orthodox Jew does not wish to think like a medieval rabbi, even though he wishes to fully understand what the medieval rabbi wrote and believed. **The Modern Orthodox Jew wishes to draw on the wisdom of the past, not to be**

part of the past. [emphasis added]

The philosophy of Modern Orthodoxy is not at all new. Rather, it is a basic feature of Jewish thought throughout the centuries. In matters of halakha, for example, it is axiomatic that contemporary authorities are obligated to evaluate halakhic questions from their own immediate perspective, rather than to rely exclusively on the opinions of rabbis of previous generations. The well-known phrase that "Yiftah in his generation is like Shemuel in his generation" (Rosh haShanah 25b) expresses the need to rely on contemporary authorities, even if they are not of the stature of the authorities of previous generations. We are obligated to be "Modern Orthodox," to recognize present reality and to participate in contemporary world-time.

One of the weaknesses of contemporary Orthodoxy is that it is not "modern" in the sense just discussed. There is a prevailing attitude that teaches us to revere the opinions of the sages of previous generations, and to defer to those contemporary sages who occupy a world-time contemporary with those sages.

Who are the sages of the present world-time, who absorb the contemporary reality, the contemporary ways of thinking and analyzing? To be Modern Orthodox Jews means to accept our limitations, but it also means that we must accept our responsibility to judge according to what our own eyes see, according to our own understanding. It means to have the self-respect to accept that responsibility.

Modern Orthodoxy and pre-Modern Orthodoxy do not engage in meaningful dialogue because they operate in separate world-times. The sages of each generation are influenced by the social and political realities of their time. If many of our sages in the past believed in demons and witches, if they thought that the sun revolved around the earth, or if they assigned inferior status to women and slaves — we can understand that they were part of a world that accepted these notions. We do not show disrespect for them by understanding the context in which they lived and thought. On the contrary, we are able to understand their words better, and thus we may determine how they may or may not be applied to our own contemporary situation. It is not disrespectful to our sages if we disagree with their understanding of physics, psychology, sociology, or politics. On the contrary, it would be foolish not to draw on the advances in these fields that have been made throughout the generations, including those of our own time.

There is no sense in forcing ourselves into an earlier world-time in order to mold our ways of thinking into harmony with modes of thought of sages who lived several hundred or even several thousand years ago.

One of the nagging problems that bothers many thoughtful Orthodox Jews is how Orthodoxy has become increasingly authoritarian and obscurantist — how it has seemed to lock itself into a pre-modern worldview. There is a palpable drive to conformity — in dress, in thought, in behavior. Independent thinking — especially if inspired by "secular" wisdom — is discouraged or forbidden. It is as though people wish to pretend that findings of modern science may be casually dismissed; that women and men of today must think and act as they did in pre-modern times; that Orthodox life demands a strongly negative posture vis a vis modernity.

Thinking Jews should be standing up for a genuine modern Orthodoxy that insists on functioning in contemporary world-time. While facing modernity has its real challenges, not facing modernity will lead Orthodoxy into a cult-like existence -- out of touch with reality, out of touch with the needs of thinking and feeling human beings…out of touch with Torah itself.

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

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https://www.jewishideas.org/article/modern-and-pre-modern-orthodoxy

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Abraham Joshua Heschel: An Appreciation

By Dr. Susannah Heschel *

[note: see note after this article about a special program on January 15, by Zoom, on Rabbi Heschel]

Human identities are like categories: Invented from the outside, they rarely capture the essence of our personalities, commitments, and sparks that animate us. My father is definitely someone who doesn't fit the categories; indeed, he often writes that we too often apply the wrong categories, especially in our religious lives. Just as we wouldn't speak of a "pound of Beethoven," surely, we should not try to measure the spiritual grandeur of the Sabbath. My father never called himself a Conservative Jew, nor labeled himself in any way. He grew up in Warsaw, stemming from one of the most distinguished Hassidic families, with a royal lineage, and already as a small child, he was expected to become a rebbe. Yet he wanted to study, and in the 1920s, it was not as unusual for a pious young man to attend university. My father had already received semikha from Rabbi Menachem Zemba in Warsaw before he left for Berlin, which he viewed as a city at the center of the intellectual universe. In addition to his doctorate at the university, he took classes at the two rabbinical seminaries, Orthodox and Reform, because he wanted to understand the outlook of each school.

My father appreciated what he learned, but he was also terribly disappointed with the kind of approach his professors were taking, and he felt that none of his teachers, experts in Jewish topics, understood the nature of religious life. For his doctoral dissertation, he wrote about the Hebrew prophets. For decades, German biblical scholars, mostly Protestants, had denigrated the prophets as "ecstatics," or described them as rural country bumpkins whose messages of peace and an end to war were naïve and ridiculous when presented to urban centers, kings, and priests. No, my father wrote: The prophets were not ecstatics; they were people of extraordinary inner lives who resonated with God's own pathos and compassion. Their message was not at all naïve, but a demand for justice and a hope for ultimate peace that should guide our own lives.

My father was rescued "as a brand plucked from the fire" from Nazi Europe, and he arrived in the United States in March of 1940. After five years at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, he moved to the Upper West Side of New York City and taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary until his death in 1972.

There was always something extraordinarily moving and also terribly ephemeral about the Hassidic rebbes my father took me to visit when I was growing up in New York. These rebbes were relatives, refugees from Europe, elderly men of tremendous gentleness and exquisite refinement. The air in the room felt alive when we entered their small studies; there was an intensity in those encounters because they were a small taste, for my father, of what he had lost in Europe: family, friends, a special Jewish world that he describes in his book, *The Earth is the Lord's.*

My father wanted the whole world to know Judaism, to know the Jewish spirit that he had experienced in Poland, and he wanted American Jews to understand what they were missing with what he called the "vicarious davening" of the cold formality of the suburban Conservative and Reform synagogues. He railed against the "religious behaviorism" of Orthodox Jews who focused on the punctilious observance of the Shulhan Arukh, as if that law guide was a substitute for Torah. Judaism was in decline, he wrote, not because of the challenges of science or philosophy, but because its message had become insipid. It was time to recapture the greatness of the Torah and the Talmud, but we can only do that, he wrote, if we know what questions to ask. Jews, he said, had become messengers who forgot the message. Studying Torah and Talmud superficially brought the exile of the Shekhinah. How can we recapture the questions, the insights, and the greatness of the Torah? That was the goal of his three-volume Hebrew book, *Torah min HaShamayim.*

My father was a person who always brought people together. He was full of warmth, enthusiasm, great humor, and he filled a room with his personality. He was also the most gentle and compassionate and loving person I have ever known. I had the feeling I could tell him anything, discuss any problem. He was always open to ideas, but critically: He was never satisfied, but always wanted to know more, and move to the next step in addressing a problem. He was passionate, studying all the time, and had no interest in entertainment, relaxation, or anything that was superficial. Conversations were also intense, and so was his concern with the world.

When my father returned from the Civil Rights march in Selma, Alabama, he said, "I felt my legs were praying," a very Hassidic statement. He added that marching with Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded him of walking with Hassidic rebbes in

Europe. Before he agreed to meet with Pope Paul VI and Vatican officials in Rome concerning the formulation of Nostra - Aetate, the Church's statement regarding its relations with the Jews, he talked with his brother-in-law, the Kopycznitzer rebbe. His concern about Jews who were stranded in the Soviet Union, unable to leave and unable to practice Judaism, led my father to deliver strongly worded lectures and encourage his friend, Elie Wiesel, to visit Moscow, which led to *The Jews of Silence,* Wiesel's book about the Soviet Jews. Dr. King and my father lectured to Jewish groups together, speaking about racism, Zionism, and freedom for Soviet Jews.

In his last years, my father was brokenhearted over the war in Vietnam, which had become a political stranglehold on the presidency, and seemed to be deteriorating into a series of atrocities without clear military objectives. Dropping napalm on children, destroying villages, killing civilians: This left my father sleepless with horror. He spoke out because, he wrote, "in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible." It was impossible, he said, to be a religious Jew and not protest the atrocities committed by our government and in our name.

My father cannot be categorized. His heart was Hassidic; his life was that of a scholar and teacher. What is clear, though, is that he preserved the heart and soul of Judaism, both in his writings and in the life that he led.

My father's voice was one of "moral grandeur and spiritual audacity." He spoke out in the prophetic tradition, and we are proud that he represented the Jewish people to the world. After the devastation of Europe, he gave us back our souls, reminding us of the greatness of Judaism and urging us to study more deeply, pray with greater intensity, and always remember what we stand for.

* Daughter of Rabbi A. J. Heschel and Eli Black Professor of Jewish Studies at Dartmouth College. Reprinted from issue 31 of *Convesations,* the journal of the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/article/abraham-joshua-heschel-appreciation

Special program honoring Rabbi Heschel: **The Torah and Legacy of Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel and his Ongoing Impact on the Orthodox Community on the 50th Anniversary of His Passing** – Zoom meeting, Sunday, January 15, 8-10 p.m. Professor Heschel is one of the panelists for this program. Register at yctorah.org/heschel. Contributions to attend the zoom are voluntary.

Marriage and The Torah Home

by Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

As the Jewish family entered the exile in Mitzrayim, there were various strategies put in place to help them stay strong. Yosef instructed them to live in a cohesive community, in Goshen. Yakov instructed Yehuda to create a Yeshiva, a place of Torah study, a place of energy to help the people maintain their integrity.

This week's Parsha introduces another factor which enabled the Jewish family to survive and even thrive despite the adverse conditions of exile. The Torah states, *"Each man came with his home."* Each man's home, built with great devotion together by husband and wife, was critical for their success to get them through the volatile time of exile and transition. In fact, when listing the names of the shevatim (tribes), the Torah lists them — not in their birth order — but rather in the order that their families started. First Yakov formed a home with Leah, so her children (even those born after the others) are listed first. Then Yakov married Rochel, so Binyomin is listed next (even though he was the youngest). The marriages of Bilha and Zilpa followed, so their children are listed afterwards. It is the Torah home, and the marriage it is based on, which is critical in the story of the exile and redemption.

Marriage is a big venture. It involves merging two independent people to become life partners, able to live together, complement each other, and operate with synergy and effective collaboration. To accomplish this merging of lives, the Torah instructs us with a mitzva commonly known as Shanah Rishona, in which the first year of marriage is sacred and protected as bonding time between husband and wife. It is anticipated that by focusing and strengthening their union during its formative stages, husband and wife will be effective in creating the life-long bond that will carry them in a lifetime

of love, respect, and collaboration.

Torah leaders of recent generations have noted that due to the distractions of more recent times, it takes longer to create the Shanah Rishona effect than in the past. Some say that today it takes five years; others say ten years. But time alone does not automatically ensure effective bonding. Husband and wife are building together what is arguably their greatest accomplishment and partnership in life. Diligent effort — both physical and emotional — are needed to forge and create the treasured union called US.

The Torah home is a most discreet feature of Jewish life. It is not as noticed as the Jewish community, and it does not take center stage of the public eye the way a shul or Yeshiva does. But it is the Torah home that is responsible for the success of the Jewish people in exile and in redemption. It is in the home that children are formed physically, spiritually, and emotionally. It is in the home that both husband and wife are nurtured on a personal level to be energized and loyal to the values they hold dear.

The partnership of husband and wife, their relationship, and their collaboration, is the secret key to the future and integrity of the Jewish people. Just as the mikva plays a discreet but pivotal role in Jewish life, so does the Jewish home play a most discreet but pivotal role for the Jewish people.

The book of Shimos contains awesome accomplishments. It addresses surviving exile and redemption. It describes the revelation at Sinai and the building of the Mishkan. All of this emanates from the strength of family and the Torah home that a husband and wife build together. It is with this theme that the book of Shimos begins as the Torah declares, *"Each man came with his home."*

The mitzva that husband and wife have of Shanah Rishona, to nurture each other, to spend time together and bond, is critical to create the strong and nurturing partnership needed for this venture called building a Torah Home. Even after the technical time called Shanah Rishona, those principles must remain front and center. Trust, love, and an appreciation for each other are the heartbeat of this relationship and the keys to the success of the Jewish people.

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

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

Shemot -- Energizing Our Mitzvos

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer*

Parshas Shemos transitions from the lessons of creation and the lives of our forefathers and begins the lessons of the birth of our nation. Much of the Parsha is devoted to Moshe's life. We are told of how he is raised in the palace, yet remembers his brothers and defends a fellow Jew from an Egyptian oppressor. We learn of his experiences in exile in Midyan and how he continues to defend those in need. We learn at length of G-d's initial conversations with Moshe and his great humility. We learn of his great decency, asking his father-in-law's permission before leaving and returning to Egypt. Finally, we learn of his initial encounters with Pharaoh and his strength and love for G-d's children, leading him to struggle with the worsening slavery he witnesses.

In the midst of these lofty introductions, we are also taught briefly of what appears to be an almost fatal error on Moshe's part. As he is leaving Midyan to return to Egypt he delays his son's Bris Milah. As Moshe settles his family in to an inn one night on their way to Egypt, G-d takes Moshe to task for this failure, and Moshe nearly dies. His wife, Tzipporah, recognizes what is happening and why and proceeds to circumcise their son. Only when she throws the foreskin at Moshe's feet does Moshe begin to recover. (Shemos 4:24-26)

The Ralba"g (ibid.) notes that Moshe's error in delaying his son's bris is certainly not deserving of the death penalty. He explains that Moshe's intentions were pure, and that his error was a minor error of judgement. Moshe felt that G-d would not want him to separate from his family. If he would circumcise his son, he would have to wait until the infant healed before traveling to Egypt to begin the process of the Exodus. Although Moshe was right that family connections are important, it was not appropriate for a leader to delay a mitzvah. People look up to and learn from their leaders. If the leader of the Jewish people is lackadaisical in his attitude toward mitzvos, people would learn from his example and become lackadaisical in their own observance. Therefore, it would have been best for Moshe to circumcise his son and then travel alone to Egypt.

The Ralba"g explains that it was also because of his role as a leader that he was treated so severely. G-d was impressing upon Moshe that as a leader he cannot allow any delays in his own performance of mitzvos, because any lack in his own alacrity would be reflected in all those who learn from him. The attitude in which we approach our observance of mitzvos is a fundamental element of our service of G-d. It was, therefore, of critical importance that those who would receive the Torah collectively approach mitzvos with alacrity and zeal.

The Orchos Tzaddikim expounds on this concept in the Gate of Alacrity. He notes that the alacrity with which one approaches mitzvos is an expression of one's love and recognition of G-d. "Alacrity is dependant on the person's heart. When a person clears his heart of all other thoughts and grabs hold of one thought, then they are alacritous." When one approaches mitzvos with zeal, this shows that they truly care about G-d's will. It was for this reason that Moshe had to be extra careful to ensure that he always did mitzvos as soon as the opportunity arose. As the leader he had to teach the nation that serving G-d is our highest objective.

The Mesillas Yesharim (Chapter 7) adds another element to the importance of doing mitzvos with zeal. One of the great gifts of placing our souls into this physical existence, is that our souls can be changed through our physical actions. When we act with kindness or mercy, we awaken those attributes within our souls. So, too, he says, we can increase and develop a feeling of passion and devotion to G-d by doing mitzvos with zeal. When we put physical energy into our mitzvos, this can awaken our souls to the significance of our mitzvos.

The way we approach a mitzvah can be even more important than the mitzvah itself. The mitzvos are our connection and our relationship with G-d. Each mitzvah is its own connection, and each mitzvah must be cherished and valued. We must express and develop that value by doing our mitzvos with zeal.

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Righteous Women

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia *****

Full Room-Service

The Talmud says that because of the merit of righteous women, the Israelites were redeemed from Egypt)Sotah 11:2(. Apparently, the claim that the Rabbis marginalized women or ignored their contribution to society is wrong. But let us read the whole story and see if this is an accurate assessment.

> *"The Israelites were redeemed from Egypt because of the merit of the righteous women. The women would boil water and fish and take them to their men in the field. They would give them hot baths, anoint them with oil, and feed them the fish. Then they would serve them wine and then lie with them in the field.*
>
> *When the time came to give birth, they would do it in the field under the apple trees. Angels were*

sent from heaven to wash and feed the babies."

Men's Paradise

Is this a story of brave women leading an underground resistance? The women who will not give up and keep having children? The women who entice their poor, enslaved, and exhausted husbands?
Unfortunately, this is a different story, written by men. For the author of this Midrash, women are an instrument which produces the next generation. Those righteous women march to the fields with luxurious baths and food for the men. They feed and comfort the men, serve them wine, and sleep with them. When the babies are born, they do not distract the women's attention from their men. There are angel-nannies who take care of them, and the women continue to care for the men. This is not slavery in Egypt, it is men's paradise!

Army of Babies

How did the righteous women become men-pleasing machines? The original Midrash stated that the redemption was in the merit of the righteous women. It referred to five specific women who were instrumental, each in her own way, in ushering in the future redemption.

A later author took the story to the realms of myth and fantasy. That was probably necessary after the destruction of the Temple, the fall of Masada, and the failed Bar Kokhva revolt.

The author's message is that Jews can only defeat the mighty Roman Empire by having more children. And so, the five brave women have turned into servile reproduction machines. It is the kind of "plan" used by poor and oppressed populations as a last resort.

Time to Move On

That message might have served Jews well in the past, but it is not in place today. It is degrading for women, and it minimizes the importance of love and closeness between parents and children. The next generation becomes a weapon against our enemies, an idea associated with fanatic tyrants. We also know that uncontrolled growth is unsustainable, and that family planning is essential for our survival as a specie. It is time to bid farewell to the exilic mentality. We are no more the helpless and persecuted whose only strength is being fruitful and multiplying. Judaism has a wonderful system of law and values which can actively make our life and our world better.

Interview with Yokheved

Luckily, I was able to get an exclusive interview with Yokheved, Moshe's mother. I asked her how she sees the role of righteous women, and whether she is happy with this Midrash.

Yokheved: I am so glad you brought up this question, because I feel that the voice of women is silenced. This legend about women delivering sextuplets and producing an army of 600,000 men stresses me out. My grandchildren started asking me about the fish and water I would serve Amram in the field. Why should children even talk about it? We did not wash and feed the men, and definitely did not sleep with them in the field. Who does that? It's terrible! But what really bothers me with this story is our image as husband-pleasing, meal-cooking, baby-producing machines. How can we inspire our daughters with such tales? And our future generations, what kind of righteous women will they be?

Defiant Heroes

Yokehevd falls silent for a moment, pensive, then continues: Let me tell you about the true righteous woman! She reveres no one but God, she is strong and unyielding, and she emanates love and compassion. And let me tell you who are the righteous women who brought forth the redemption. They have names!

The first two, the heroes, the role models, are Shifrah and Puah. Ah, such powerful women! It was so easy and convenient to fold under the pressure of Pharaoh. They could kill the babies and say they were just following orders. They risked their lives by defying him. They taught us that we cannot sacrifice others to save ourselves.

Mother, Sister, Princess

When I saw their quiet and resilient victory, I decided to keep my baby against all odds. I looked for a barren Egyptian woman who will adopt a Hebrew infant left on her doorstep. The Hebrew maids in the palace informed me that the princess is a candidate. I put him in a basket and planted it among the reeds near the princess' favorite bathing spot. My daughter Miriam kept watch, and in her audacity convinced the princess to let me be his wet-nurse.

But all would be for nothing if not for the courage and astuteness of the princess. Pharaoh was enraged when he saw his adopted grandson and wanted to kill him on the spot. The princess played daddy's little girl very convincingly, threw a tantrum, and then fell quiet and unresponsive. Pharaoh caved in and let her have the baby, and I was the wet-nurse.

Standing with Moshe

Nursing Moshe was telling him stories of our glorious past, of our forefathers, and especially my grandfather Jacob. I fed him stories of the Promised Land and the suffering of his brethren. I told him of the courageous women who risked their lives so he could live. He knew all about the cruel enslavement and was more inspired than anyone to lead the nation to freedom. When he went out that day to see the suffering of his brothers, all of us stood there with him. Shifrah and Puah, Miriam and me, and Pharaoh's daughter.

Let me tell you this, great women do not stand behind great men. They stand with, in front, or ahead of them. They give them life, love, education, values, and aspiration.

Moshe would not be the great and passionate leader he was without the shield of love of his biological and adoptive mothers. He would not fight with Pharaoh and with God if not for the resilience and courage of Shifra, Puah and Miriam. We shall keep following in the footsteps of those courageous women who defeated the enemy by wit, courage, and faith.

Shabbat Shalom.

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

One Shoe, Two Shoe

By Rabbi Dan Margulies *

In this week's parsha Shemot, we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu, the greatest leader, the greatest prophet ever to serve the Jewish people. The selection of Moshe Rabbeinu and the beginning of his journey as the leader of the Israelite nation becomes a chance to explore questions related to what makes Moshe such a qualified leader and what lessons about leadership we can learn from his behavior. A perhaps startling idea about leadership, and one which should give us a certain amount of pause, comes from a midrashic collection called Lekach Tov from eleventh century Greece. Lekach Tov explores the following midrash about Moshe's encounter at the burning bush.

The Torah tells us that God's first instruction to Moshe when he arrives at the burning bush is *"Remove your shoes from your feet"* (Shemot 3:5). Moshe is supposed to remove his shoes, presumably a sign of humility and as recognition of the sanctity of the location. This is contrasted in the midrash, surprisingly, to a similar episode with Moshe's successor, Yehoshua. When Yehoshua encounters an angelic being, the angel tells Yehoshua, *"Remove your shoe from your feet"*

(Yehoshua 5:15). Notice the subtle difference in the vocalization [ed: in the Hebrew] of the two words. When Moshe is instructed by God at the burning bush to remove his shoes, it's נְעָלֶיךָ, his shoes in the plural. When Yehoshua is told to remove his shoe by the angel, it's נַעֲלֶךָ, his shoe in the singular. The midrash contrasts Moshe and Yehoshua and tells us that the two shoes that Moshe has to remove rather than Yehoshua's single shoe are significant. The midrash says that Moshe had to give up on two things in order to serve as the leader of the Jewish people throughout the period of yetziat Mitzrayim and the forty years in the desert. What were those two things? Entering into the land of Israel, and, that his sons would not fill his role after him and he would therefore not have a biological successor. Instead his intellectual successor and spiritual heir Yehoshua would enter the land (Midrash Lekach Tov Exodus 3:5). The Midrash Lekach Tov is pointing to the fact that despite Moshe's great leadership of taking us out of slavery in Egypt, bringing us to Har Sinai, teaching the Torah, guiding Bnei Yisrael for forty years in the desert, and passing the reins to Yehoshua, Moshe had to sacrifice two very important things that he was hoping for in his life. One was to finally enter the land of Israel. The other was not having a biological heir to serve as his successor in his role as the leader of the Jewish people.

I think this is something to think about more broadly. Yes, we hold leaders up on a certain kind of pedestal. Yes, we think leadership is an excellent quality — something that we idolize and encourage. At the same time, to adopt a position of leadership comes with sacrifices. It often comes at a cost of dreams unfulfilled and to a person's family life. Those are serious calculations that we must take into account and we have to make sure we're making the right decisions.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Assistant Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and Co-Director of Community Learning at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah. Semikha from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (2017).

https://library.yctorah.org/2023/01/one-shoe-two-shoe/

Shavuon: Summer Edition

By Rabbi Moshe Rube *

[Rabbi Rube is on summer vacation, and the Auckland Hebrew Congregation is moving. Rabbi Rube will resume his column soon.]

* Rabbi Rube recently moved from Alabama to Auckland, NZ, where he is Senior Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation

[Note: It is summer now in the Southern Hemisphere.]+ Auckland Hebrew Congregation is moving to a new building and will be closed for the move. I anticipate that Rabbi Rube will resume his Devrei Torah on January 23, 2023.

Rav Kook Torah
Shemot: Moses' Love for Israel

When his initial efforts to free the Jewish slaves only resulted in Pharaoh issuing even harsher decrees, Moses complained bitterly to God:

> *"God, why do You mistreat Your people? Why did You send me? From when I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he made things even worse for these people. You have not rescued Your people!"* (Exod. 5:22-23)

The Midrash says that Middat haDin, the Attribute of Justice, sought to punish Moses for his harsh words. But God saw that Moses only spoke for the sake of the Jewish people, and he was not punished (Shemot Rabbah 5:27).

What exactly was Moses' sin that he deserved to be punished? And what did God 'see' that determined Moses was not in the wrong?

The Sick Friend

Rav Kook explained the incident with the following parable:

> Once there were two good friends, but one friend was seriously ill. His doctor determined that he could only save his life by performing a very painful operation.
>
> During surgery, the doctor did not hold it against the patient when he moaned and wept. The poor man was in great pain, and his response was to be expected.
>
> But when his healthy friend also wailed and cried out — the doctor ordered him to quiet down. The doctor interpreted his cries as a lack of faith in his medical skill, and even questioning the need for the painful procedure.

Feeling Their Pain

The Hebrew slaves, Rav Kook explained, were like the ill patient. Divine providence decreed that the Jewish people needed to undergo Pharoah's harsh decrees in order to be redeemed, like a painful operation necessary to save the patient's life. When the Israelites cried out under the oppression and persecution of Egypt, that was understandable.

But Moses — why was he complaining? Did he not have faith in God's ability to redeem Israel? The Attribute of Strict Justice objected to Moses' complaints; this lack of faith should be rebuked and punished.

But the One who "searches the heart and examines the mind" saw into the depths of Moses' heart. Moses was like a dear friend who cannot help but share in his friend's pain. When the doctor operated on his friend, he felt as if the knife was slicing his own flesh.

"Moses is speaking for the Jewish people," God pronounced. He did not deserve to be punished. The "faithful shepherd" cried out spontaneously, in his great love for his people.

This is the model for a true leader. The people are not a stepping stone to attain high office. They are the goal of public service.

As chief rabbi, Rav Kook was keenly aware of his duty to serve the people. Often he would sign his letters, עבד לעם קדוש — "servant to a holy nation."

(Adapted from Mo'adei HaRe'iyah, pp. 233-234.)

https://www.ravkooktorah.org/SHMOT-80.htm

The Challenge of Jewish Leadership (Shemot 5771)

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

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

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

How did Moses know this? The answer lies many years back in his youth. It was then when, having grown up, he went out to see his people for the first time. He saw them enslaved, being forced into heavy labour.

He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his people. He intervened and saved his life. The next day he saw two Hebrews fighting, and again he intervened. This time the man he stopped said to him, "Who appointed you as our leader and judge?"

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

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

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

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

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

> *They came as a group to oppose Moses and Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord assembly?"* Num. 16:3

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

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

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

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

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

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

https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/shemot/the-challenge-of-jewish-leadership/ 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.

How Long Can We Wait?

By Chaya Shuchat * © Chabad 2023

It is so hard to wait.

Watching a loved one in pain or in crisis, waiting desperately for a turn for the better.

When you've done everything you could do, prayed every prayer, cried every tear.

When there's nothing to do but wait.

Like Miriam, waiting on her brother Moses.

She had just seen the casket holding her precious baby brother float away down the Nile. And she stood waiting. *"His sister stood from afar, to know what would happen with him."*1

The birth of Moses, in large part, was due to Miriam. The Midrash2 relates that her parents, Amram and Yocheved, had separated. What use was there to bring more children into the world when the Egyptian enslavement was so bitter, when all newborn baby boys had been condemned to death by being cast into the Nile? And what Amram did, the rest of the Jewish people followed.

Miriam, only 5 years old, admonished her father. *"Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's! He decreed only on the boys, but your decree is on the girls as well!"* She promised her parents that if they remarried, they would be blessed with a child who would redeem the people of Israel.

When Yocheved placed baby Moses in the river to escape Pharaoh's cruel decree, Amram tapped Miriam on the head, saying, *"What's with your prophecy now, Miriam?*"

And Miriam stood behind the reeds, waiting. Not in horror, not in despair, but in expectation. What would be of her prophecy?

And because she was there waiting, she witnessed Pharaoh's daughter, Batya, lift Moses out of the water. She saw Moses refuse to suckle from the Egyptian nursemaids. And because she was right there, waiting, she was able to offer Batya the services of a Jewish nursemaid — her own mother.

Was it a miracle that baby Moses was saved to grow up to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt? It was a miracle all right, but a very natural sort of miracle. Batya spotted the baby and lifted him out, Miriam noticing and calling her mother — nothing supernatural about any of these events. But none of this would have happened without Miriam being on the spot, waiting.

We Jews know what it means to wait; we've been doing that for a long time. And we haven't been waiting idly. We've done a lot of good work, too — prayers, Torah study, good deeds, acts of kindness. But we've been waiting for so long, and it's hard to wait anymore. It's natural for bitterness to set in. This exile has been brutal. So much suffering and pain.

But Miriam shows us how to wait. With bitterness over our suffering but not with despair. Nobody felt the exile more deeply than Miriam. It is reflected in her name, from the Hebrew root of mar, bitter. Yet despite her pain, Miriam crafted tambourines in Egypt. She had no doubt that her prophecy would be fulfilled, their suffering would end, and they would dance one day.3 After their liberation, she carried those tambourines into the desert, and led the Jewish women in song and dance.

As we wait for our universal and personal redemption — in whatever area it may be — we derive strength from Miriam. Just as she stood by her brother's side, she stands by our side as well, instilling us with courage and hope. And with her power, we will merit to see the redemption, and we will be the first to celebrate.

)Based on an address of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, 13 and 15 Shevat, 5752.(

FOOTNOTES:

1. Exodus 2:4.

2. Sotah 12a.

3. Rashi on Exodus 15:20. See also, *Tambourines of Rebellion.*

* Pediatric nurse and author of A *Diamond a Day,* an adaptation of the chassidic classic Hayom Yom for children, and many articles on the interface between Chassidism and contemporary life.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5753260/jewish/How-Long-Can-We-Wait.htm

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Shemot: What Pharaoh Did Not Know

by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky *

Hearing G-d's Voice

> Pharaoh said, *"Who is Havayah [G-d] that I should heed His voice and send forth Israel? I do not recognize Havayah, nor will I send Israel forth."* (Ex. 5:2)

The Divine Name *Havayah* refers to G-d outside the context of His creation. In contrast, the Name *Elokim* refers to G-d the Creator, acting within nature.

Pharaoh did indeed believe in G-d as the creative force within nature, but he knew nothing of a G-d beyond nature. One of the laws of nature is that the strong can overpower and rule the weak, so, since the Egyptians were stronger than the Jews, Pharaoh felt that it was their G-d-given right to rule over them. He could not accept the possibility that there was a G-d beyond nature who could override the laws of nature and declare that the strong should release the weak from their rule, even against their will, simply because this is the right thing to do.

G-d sent Moses to show Pharaoh that G-d is not limited by the laws of nature. We, too, must listen to our inner "Moses," telling our inner "Pharaoh" that there is a moral code beyond the laws of nature, through which we – by following it – can indeed rise above our natural drives and inclinations.

– From Kehot's Daily Wisdom #3

Gut Shabbos,
Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society

* A Chasidic insight that Rabbi Wisnefsky selected for the parsha.

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Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 29, Issue 13 **Shabbat Parashat Shemot** **5783 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Faith in the Future

Some measure of the radicalism that is introduced into the world by the story of the Exodus can be seen in the sustained mistranslation of the three keywords with which God identified Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush.

At first, He described Himself as follows: "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." But then, after Moses heard the mission he was to be sent on, he said to God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' Then what shall I tell them?" That was when God replied, cryptically, Ehyeh asher ehyeh (Ex. 3:14).

This was translated into Greek as ego eimi ho on, and into Latin as ego sum qui sum, meaning 'I am who I am', or 'I am He who is'. The early and medieval Christian theologians all understood the phrase to be speaking about ontology, the metaphysical nature of God's existence as the ground of all being. It meant that He was 'Being-itself, timeless, immutable, incorporeal, understood as the subsisting act of all existing'. Augustine defines God as that which does not change and cannot change. Aquinas, continuing the same tradition, reads the Exodus formula as saying that God is 'true being, that is, being that is eternal, immutable, simple, self-sufficient, and the cause and principal of every creature'.[1]

But this is the God of Aristotle and the philosophers, not the God of Abraham and the Prophets. Ehyeh asher ehyeh means none of these things. It means 'I will be what, where, or how I will be'. The essential element of the phrase is the dimension omitted by all the early Christian translations, namely the future tense. God is defining Himself as the Lord of history who is about to intervene in an unprecedented way, to liberate a group of slaves from the mightiest empire of the ancient world and lead them on a journey towards liberty. Already in the eleventh century, reacting against the neo-Aristotelianism that he saw creeping into Judaism, Judah Halevi made the point that God introduces Himself at the beginning of the Ten Commandments not by saying, "I am the Lord your God who created heaven and earth," but rather, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery." [2]

Far from being timeless and immutable, God in the Hebrew Bible is active, engaged, in constant dialogue with His people, calling, urging, warning, challenging and forgiving. When Malachi says in the name of God, 'I the Lord do not change' (Malachi 3:6), he is not speaking about His essence as pure being, the unmoved mover, but about His moral commitments. God keeps His promises even when His children break theirs. What does not change about God are the covenants He makes with Noah, Abraham and the Israelites at Sinai.

So remote is the God of pure being – the legacy of Plato and Aristotle – that the distance is bridged in Christianity by a figure that has no counterpart in Judaism, the son of God, one person who is both human and Divine. In Judaism we are all both human and Divine, dust of the earth yet breathing God's breath and bearing God's image. These are profoundly different theologies.

"I will be what I will be" means that I will enter history and transform it. God was telling Moses that there was no way he or anyone else could know in advance what God was about to do. He told him in general terms that He was about to rescue the Israelites from the hands of the Egyptians and bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey. But as for specifics, Moses and the people would know God not through His essence but through His acts. Therefore, the future tense is key here. They could not know Him until he acted.

He would be a God of surprises. He would do things never seen before, create signs and wonders that would be spoken about for thousands of years. They would set in motion wave after wave of repercussions. People would learn that slavery is not an inevitable condition, that might is not right, that empires are not impregnable, and that a tiny people like the Israelites could do great things if they attached their destiny to heaven. But none of this could be predicted in advance. God was saying to Moses and to the people, You will have to trust Me. The destination to which I am calling you is just beyond the visible horizon.

It is very hard to understand how revolutionary this was. Ancient religions were deeply conservative, designed to show that the existing social hierarchy was inevitable, part of the deep structure of reality, timeless and unchangeable. Just as there was a hierarchy in the heavens, and another within the animal kingdom, so there was a hierarchy in human society. That was order. Anything that challenged it represented chaos. Until Israel appeared on the scene, religion was a way of consecrating the status quo.

That is what the story of Israel would overturn. The greatest empire on earth was about to be overthrown. The most powerless of people – foreigners, slaves – were going to go free. This was not simply a blow to Egypt. Although it would take thousands of years, it was a deadly blow to the very concept of a hierarchical society, or of time as what Plato called it, "a moving image of eternity," a series of passing shadows on a wall of reality that never changes.

Instead, history became an arena of change. Time became something understood as a narrative, a journey or a quest. All this is hinted at in those three words, "I will be what I will be." I am the God of the future tense.

So Judaism, in the concept of a Messianic age, became the only civilisation whose golden age is in the future. And throughout the Torah, the promised land lies in the future. Abraham does not acquire it. Nor does Isaac. Nor does Jacob. Even Moses, who spends forty years leading the people there, does not get to enter it. It is always just beyond. Soon but not yet.

I think this is one of the most important ideas of Judaism. I wrote a book about it, called Future Tense.[3] I remember one evening when Elaine and I had the privilege of discussing this with the founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, in his home in Philadelphia. He was toying with a similar idea. After years of practising psychology he had come to the conclusion that the people with a positive psychology tended to be future-oriented, whereas those with a negative mindset – he called this, in a brilliant phrase, "learned helplessness" – were often fixated on the past.

A few years later, he and three other scholars published a book on the subject called Homo Prospectus.[4] What is it, he asked, that makes Homo sapiens different from other species? Answer, we have an unrivalled ability "to be guided by imagining alternatives stretching into the future – prospection." We are the future-oriented animal.

I wish this were more deeply understood, because it is fundamental. I have long argued that a fallacy dominates the scientific study of humankind. Science searches for causes; a cause always precedes its effect; therefore science will always seek to explain a phenomenon in the present by reference to

something that happened in the past – anything from the genome to early childhood experiences to brain chemistry to recent stimuli. It will follow that science will inevitably deny the existence of human freewill. The denial may be soft or hard, gentle or brutal, but it will come. Freedom will be seen as an illusion. The best we can hope for is Karl Marx's definition of freedom as "consciousness of necessity."

But this is a fallacy. Human action is always oriented to the future. I put the kettle on because I want a cup of coffee. I work hard because I want to pass the exam. I act to bring about a future that is not yet. Science cannot account for the future because something that hasn't happened yet cannot be a cause. Therefore there will always be something about intentional human action that science cannot fully explain.

When God said, "I will be what I will be," He was telling us something not only about God but about us when we are open to God and have faith in His faith in us.

We can be what we will be if we choose the right and the good. And if we fail and fall, we can change because God lifts us and gives us strength.

And if we can change ourselves, then together we can change the world. We cannot end evil and suffering but we can diminish it. We cannot eliminate injustice, but we can fight it. We cannot abolish sickness but we can treat it and search for cures.

Whenever I visit Israel, I find myself awestruck by the way this ancient people in its history-saturated land is one of the most future-oriented nations on earth, constantly searching for new advances in medical, informational, and nano-technology. Israel writes its story in the future tense.

And the future is the sphere of human freedom, because I cannot change yesterday but I can change tomorrow by what I do today. Therefore, because Judaism is a religion of the future it is a religion of human freedom, and because Israel is a future-oriented nation, it remains, in the Middle East, an oasis of freedom in a desert of oppression. Tragically, most of Israel's enemies are fixated on the past, and as long as they remain so, their people will never find freedom and Israel will never find peace.

I believe that we must honour the past but not live in it. Faith is a revolutionary force. God is calling to us as once He called to Moses, asking us to have faith in the future and then, with His help, to build it.

[1] See the insightful study by Richard Kearney, The God Who May Be: A Hermeneutics of Religion, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001, pp. 20–38, from which these references are drawn.

[2] Judah Halevi, The Kuzari (Kitab Al Khazari): An Argument for the Faith of Israel, New York, Schocken, 1964, Book I, p. 25.

[3] Jonathan Sacks, Future Tense, Hodder and Stoughton, 2009, especially the last chapter, 231-52.

[4] Martin Seligman, et al., Homo Prospectus, Oxford University Press, 2017.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

"A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Why is Joseph, the towering personality of the last four portions of the Book of Genesis, not considered the fourth patriarch of Israel? After all, he receives a double share of the inheritance through Manasseh and Ephraim, the two tribes who emanate from his loins – and it is he who saves his family, and thus the Jewish people, from starvation and oblivion.

Moreover, why does Moses emerge as the savior and redeemer of the Book of Exodus? What catapults this prince of Egypt to such an exalted position of Jewish leadership when he was raised in Pharaoh's palace, sports an Egyptian name (Moses means "son" in Egyptian) and seems totally disconnected from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Let us begin with Moses. I believe it was the great Professor Nechama Leibowitz, of blessed memory, who pointed out that Moses is the great fighter against injustice, whether it is perpetrated by Egyptian (gentile) against Hebrew (Exodus 2:11), by Hebrew against Hebrew, or by Midianite (gentile) against Midianite (gentile).

When we remember how God declares that He chose and loved Abraham because he would teach later generations to "keep God's way by doing acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice," and how in this manner, "all the nations of the world will be blessed through him" (Genesis 18:18,19), we realize that by fighting injustice in all three of these spheres Moses is expressing a direct line of continuity with Abraham, the first Hebrew and the recipient of God's covenant.

However, there is one category that is absent from Moses's list: an injustice performed by a Jew against a gentile. Clearly, the Bible understands the necessity of acting against injustice no matter what the ethnic profile of either oppressor or victim, since the source of Moses's commitment to strike out against injustice – in addition to whatever stories about Abraham he may have heard from his biological mother, Jochebed – was the example of his adoptive mother. This Egyptian princess flouted the cruel law of her father Pharaoh, risking her life, to save the Hebrew baby floating in an ark on the Nile River.

It is precisely this message of universality which the Bible expresses in the very first of Moses's acts against injustice, when he slays the Egyptian taskmaster beating the Hebrew: "…And he [Moses] saw an Egyptian personage [ish] beating a Hebrew personage [ish] from amongst his [Moses's] brothers. And he looked at that one [the oppressor] and at the other one [the victim], and when he realized that there was no [real] personage [ish], he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11,12).

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, explains that the Hebrew word "ish" is the highest category of the various Hebrew terms for "man." And, used to refer to both the Egyptian and the Hebrew, the word certainly conveys universal application. Moses was familiar with both Egyptian and Hebrew societies and recognized both the oppressor and the oppressed as having been important personages in their respective environments and communities.

But now that they had been thrust together as oppressor and victim, when Moses looked at each of them, he realized that each had lost his elevated status of "persona"; the very act of oppression demeans and demotes both perpetrator and sufferer, robs each of his status as having been created in the image of the Divine; there was longer an "ish" amongst them. And this would seem to be irrespective of who is the Egyptian and who is the Hebrew.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Open Eyes, and an Open Heart

I was always taught of the advantage of simplicity in language. My favorite author during my adolescence was Ernest Hemingway, and I remember reading comments that he made criticizing those who used multi-syllable words when shorter words would suffice.

Then, I went to graduate school in psychology and learned quite the opposite lesson. There I learned that if one could invent a word with multiple syllables to describe a simple phenomenon, he could gain credibility as an expert, even without real expertise.

Take, for example, a word with seven syllables: compartmentalization. Sounds impressive, but what does it mean? The dictionary that I consulted offers two meanings. One, "the act of distributing things into classes or categories of the same type." A simple definition, but one having nothing to do with psychology.

The second dictionary definition that I discovered is "a mild state of dissociation." Of course, to understand this definition, one must know that dissociation is a psychological process by which one splits two sets of perceptions or emotions into two separate inner worlds so that one does not affect the other.

All of us practice compartmentalization in this sense when we turn on the television, see some news events that are especially troubling to us

and simply turn off the TV. Many of us did this when we witnessed the horrible forest fires in northern Israel and the damage and suffering, both physical and emotional, that they caused. Watching the agony of the families whose loved ones were affected by those fires was, for many of us, too much to bear. And so, perhaps after a minute or so, we turned off the TV to avoid being confronted with such human suffering.

This might be normal human behavior, and perhaps even necessary to avoid being constantly overwhelmed with negative emotions. But it is not the behavior of a true leader. And it was not the behavior of Moses in this week's Torah portion, Shemot.

Rather, "...he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens..." (Exodus 2:11). Upon which Rashi comments, "He gave his eyes and his heart [in order] to be troubled about them". Not only did he not avoid the scene of Jewish suffering, but he made sure that he beheld it ("his eyes"), and that it affected him emotionally ("his heart").

Two very important, albeit very different, early 20th century commentators have much to say about our verse. Rabbi Joseph Hertz, in his sadly neglected commentary, writes, "He went out to his brethren. In later ages it must alas be said of many a son of Israel who had become great, that he went away from his brethren." How well this former chief rabbi of the British Commonwealth captures the notion of compartmentalization. It is the process by which we "look away" from upsetting scenes, rather than carefully looking "at them".

Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, known as the "Alter" (old man) of Kelm devotes the opening sermon of his remarkable collection of ethical discourses to our verse and to the criticism of the psychological process which we call "compartmentalization".

The "Alter" points out that Moses was not content simply to hear about the suffering of his brothers while he sat comfortably in the palace. Rather he "went out" to see for himself. Moses wanted to witness the suffering of his brothers personally. Moses knew the secret of the power of direct sensory perception. Moses wanted to have the image of the burdens of slavery impressed upon his mind's eye.

For the "Alter", who was one of the earliest leaders of the Mussar movement, ethical behavior demands the use of imagery to arouse emotions and thus stimulate proper ethical behavior. Moses used his eyes to inspire his heart to motivate his actions. Vision, feeling, behavior: the three essential components of the truly ethical personality.

The lesson for all of us here is that to be a truly ethical person, one must invest in the effort of becoming familiar with the plight of others. One must avoid the temptation of "looking away". From a psychological perspective, compartmentalization might be a healthy defense mechanism, necessary to avoid being flooded by images of evil. From an ethical perspective, on the other hand, compartmentalization is a seven-syllable word which, in simple terms, means avoidance of one's responsibilities to another.

How instructive is the Hasidic tale of the Rabbi who met the village drunkard in the town square. The drunkard asked him, "Rabbi, do you love me?" To which the rabbi replied, "Of course I love you. I love all Jews!"

The drunkard then responded, "So tell me then, Rabbi. What hurts me?" The rabbi had no answer, and so the drunkard exclaimed, "If you truly loved me, you would know what hurts me."

To know what hurts, we must be sure to open our eyes and hearts to see and feel the pain.

Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is a machlokes in Masechta Sanhedrin (110b) as to how old a child needs to be before being eligible to enter Olam HaBah. Rav Chiya and Rav Shimon bar Rebbi argue as to whether it is from the moment of birth or from the moment the child learns to speak. However, the Gemara there has a third opinion – Ravina says it is from the moment of

conception. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in a Teshuva in Yoreh De'ah (III:138) that we pasken like Ravina.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Be Careful What You Daven For - His sister stood at a distance to learn what would happen to him." (Shemos 2:6).

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

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

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

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

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

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

Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm's Derashot Ledorot

Menschlichkeit

In Yiddish, the word for "man," mensch, represents more than a biological species, the Homo sapiens. A mensch is also one who has a mature personality, a fully developed character, a sense of finesse and savoir-faire – one who is courteous, well-mannered, and amply endowed with the qualities of patience and self-restraint. One of the greatest compliments we can pay a person is to say of him that "he is a mensch." Conversely, to say that "he is not a mensch" is an indictment of him.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for man, "ish," implies the same shade of meaning. Thus, when David, on his death-bed, gives Solomon his last instructions (I Kings 2:2), and tells him "vehazakta vehayita le'ish," be strong and be an "ish," he does not mean "be a man" in the usual sense, but rather, be a mensch!

Our Rabbis evidently rated menschlichkeit very high on the list of virtues. Thus, they taught in Ethics of the Fathers (2:6) that "ein boor yerei ĥet," an empty-headed person cannot be sin-fearing; an "am ha'aretz" or ignoramus cannot be a "hasid" or pious man; the shy person cannot become a "lomed" or student; the quick tempered cannot be a "melamed" or teacher. There is here an ascending scale of values: from the "yerei het" or sin-fearing individual, to the "hasid," the pious one, to the student, to the teacher. The last, and thus the highest of all, is given as: "bemakom she'ein anashim, hishtadel lihiyot ish" – where there are no menschen, you must try to be an "ish" or mensch. Menschlichkeit, therefore, is higher than sin-fearing, piety, studying, or even teaching Torah!

What is a mensch? A single comprehensive definition is too difficult and too elusive. Let us, rather, list some of the ingredients of menschlichkeit and analyze some of the problems that are, in fact, crucial to the philosophy and religious outlook of the modern Jew.

First, a mensch is one who does not shrink from a difficult task which his conscience requires of him. He does not invent little excuses for his moral laziness. When Moses, as today's sidra reports (Exodus 2:12), saw a terrible injustice committed by an Egyptian against a Hebrew, "vayifen ko vakhoh vayar ki ein ish," he looked about him and saw that there was no "ish," no true mensch, one who would rise to the occasion and rescue the oppressed from his persecutor – therefore, he himself smote the Egyptian. In a place where there were no menschen, Moses was the mensch, the "ish." Maimonides (Guide for the Perplexed, 3:45) incorporated this teaching

into his philosophy of prophecy: Before a man can receive the divine inspiration of nevu'a, he must first show the moral heroism that is reflected in great acts of social justice and humanitarianism.

Yet this is not as simple and clear cut as it may seem. Actually, it requires a wealth of common sense and not-so-common intuitive judgment to be able to walk the tightrope between two extremes – impulsiveness on the one hand, and procrastination on the other.

A child, an immature person, will also respond to a sense of duty – but precipitously, thoughtlessly, and prematurely. He will impatiently leap to conclusions without thinking. As a result, he will one day decide one way, the other day he will take off in a different direction. A mensch, however, is more responsible and more consistent. One commentator (HaKetav VeHaKabbala) sees the root of ish as "yesh" or "yeshiut" – the quality of being substantial, consistent, settled, or lasting. A mensch does not vacillate. His impulsiveness is moderated by yeshiut, by constancy and thoughtfulness.

But there is the other extreme that a mensch must equally avoid. That is the tendency to dawdle endlessly and so never rise to the challenges of life. There are people who are so thoughtful that they can never come to a decision – even when life demands it. The American critic Lionel Trilling speaks of people who are so open-minded that their brains fall out! They always contemplate what is right, expect and hope to do it – but never get around to it. When Moses looked about for an "ish" to take up the cudgels on behalf of the oppressed Jews, he never found any. No doubt there were many who knew what had to be done – but they were busy making up their minds if this was the right time. They probably considered the effects on good Egyptian-Jewish relations. Will it make the Egyptians worse? Was the Egyptian possibly justified in his own mind? There were probably those who shook their heads and said "something ought to be done" – but never did anything, until Moses came along. Th is endless procrastination, this paralysis of will in the face of overriding duty, is incompatible with menschlichkeit.

David says, in Psalms (90:9), "kilinu shanenu kemo hegeh," "we have spent our years like hegeh." That last word is usually translated as "a tale that is told," or "a sigh" – from the word "lehegot," to speak or utter. But the Gaon of Vilna has a far more acute insight: "hegeh" is related to the phrase "higayon bekhinor," to play on a harp or lyre. Thus, "we have spent our years tuning up" – always preparing, practicing, expecting, waiting – but never accomplishing. What a tragedy – spending a life tuning up, but never quite producing a single clear note or melody. Some of us suffer from that – and it is a defect in our menschlichkeit. We want to study and use our heads, learn some Torah. So we prepare, inquire about classes, set the alarm, look about for babysitters, buy notebooks – we tune up, but never quite get around to the actual learning. We would like to be as charitable in a significant way as we know we should. So we think and question, discuss it with our accountants, partners, wives, children – and then we discover that life is past – "kilinu shanenu" – and we still have done none of those things we deemed so precious and so wanted to do! "Kemo hegeh" – those who only tune up are not yet menschen. No wonder the ancients said that a man is an "olam katan," a microcosm or small world. For just as a world has to be delicately balanced,so a mensch must be harmonious and balanced between impulsiveness and procrastination. Then he is an "ish."

The second ingredient of menschlichkeit is meekness – the awareness of one's own limitations. No man who thinks he knows everything can be a mensch. Of Moses, we are told (Numbers 12:3), "veha'ish Moshe anav me'od," "the man Moses was exceedingly meek." Meekness is what made Moses an "ish," a mensch.

In a cynical comment, the American humorist Ambrose Bierce (The Devil's Dictionary) defined "Man" as "an animal so lost in rapturous contemplation of what he thinks he is as to overlook what he indubitably ought to be." That, of course, is the definition of man as an animal, and is the very opposite of a mensch. Menschlichkeit is the civility that comes to a man when he realizes how great he can become and ought to become, and how little of that greatness he has achieved. This sense of limitation and inadequacy makes us more tolerant of the failings of others, and endows us with forgiveness and forbearance. The best criterion of a true mensch is one who always has a healthy respect for other human beings – even those who aren't menschen!

Finally, a mensch is one who has a spiritual dimension to his personality. A man becomes a mensch when he recognizes his obligations to God. On that famous statement that Moses looked about him "vayar ki ein ish," and he saw that there was no "ish," the usual interpretation is that there was no one else to be an "ish" and smite the Egyptian. But the Rabbis of the Midrash (Exodus Rabba, Shemot 1:29) offer a more novel insight – the "ish" referred to is the Egyptian himself! "Ra'a she'en toĥelet shel tzaddikim omdot heimenu velo mizaro ad sof kol hadorot" – Moses invoked the divine spirit and looked with deep insight into this Egyptian and perceived that there was no hope that either he or any of his descendants to the end of time would ever be tzaddikim, righteous. Therefore, he felt it proper to slay him for his wickedness. In other words, he saw that the Egyptian was not an "ish." Menschlichkeit implies at least the possibility of tzidkut, of a spiritual dimension.

For the Jew, this spiritual element is Torah Judaism. For our people, menschlichkeit is inseparable from Yiddishkeit. If there is anything that modern Jews have suffered from, it is the cultural schizophrenia that keeps menschlichkeit – the full, participating, blossoming, worldly personality – apart from Yiddishkeit, the specifically religious element. We have made the tragic error of imagining that you can be a true mensch without being a Jew, or a good Jew without being a mensch.

As a matter of fact, this was the philosophy of the Haskala, the movement of Jewish "Enlightenment" which to such a great extent was responsible for our contemporary assimilation. Yehudah Leib Gordon cried out his famous slogan "heyeh Yehudi bevetekha ve'ish betzetekha," "be a Jew at home and a mensch outside your home." The result was that without Yiddishkeit, there was no menschlichkeit – neither at home nor abroad! If you do not have a Jewish office and Jewish vacation and Jewish lecture-hall, in the sense of the spirit of Torah, then you cannot have a Jewish home and you cannot be a full, integrated mensch in any real sense. The true answer to the Haskala's split personality came from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch who presented his Torah concept of Yisroel-mensch – the integration of one personality of true Yiddishkeit, the finest of Israel with comprehensive menschlichkeit in the cultural and personal sense.

This indeed was the greatness of Moses, the finest example of a Jewish mensch. He fulfilled the first requirement – he responded to the call of conscience, neither too impetuously nor too tardily, by protecting the Hebrew and slaying the Egyptian. Secondly, he was a man of meekness and fully cognizant of his all too human limitations. And, above all else, he was a spiritual person.

One of the great Psalms (ch. 90) begins, "Tefilla leMoshe ish haElohim, Adonai ma'on ata hayita lanu bedor vador," "a prayer by Moses, the man of God: My Lord, you were a dwelling place for us from generation to generation." Moses was an "ish haElohim," "a man of God," one who combined menschlichkeit and Göttlichkeit, Godliness – marvelously blended into one personality. This kind of person knows that you can be a full mensch – a political leader, a general, a diplomat, a legislator – and yet the fullness of menschlichkeit comes only when you know that the "ma'on" or dwelling place of your menschlichkeit is God Himself, and that the address of your destiny and residence of your heart and soul is God and His Torah.

It is this luminous personality of Moses, the personification of Jewish menschlichkeit, which remains our undying, inspiring example – "bedor vador," "from generation to generation."

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

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

What's the antidote to polarisation?
In Parshat Shemot, the Torah provides us with a detail which simply does not make sense. Vayakam melech chadash al Mitzraim asher lo yodah et Yosef." – "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph." (Shemot 1:8).

How can this be possible? Surely everyone, and of course the king himself, knew about the great Joseph of the past?

Sefer Mayana Shel Torah gives a beautiful peirush, which explains as follows. Of course Pharaoh knew about Joseph. The trouble, however, was, "Asher lo yodah et Yosef" – he did not know him personally.

You see when there are differences between people, ignorance can breed hatred when they become 'the other'. If, however, one actually gets to know others, even those who have sharp differences with us, then we will appreciate that they are human beings just like we are. We will start to respect them and understand that they have families just like we have, etc. That was the problem with Pharaoh: he didn't have an opportunity to engage at a personal level with the Hebrews in his land.

What emerges from this text is a very powerful and relevant message for all of us. It's so crucially important for us to get to know other people, to speak to them, to engage in dialogue, and when that happens it can bring peace and understanding. After all, had Pharaoh, King of Egypt, actually personally known Joseph, then the rest of history could have been very different.

Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel
Encyclopedia of Jewish Values*

Money and Wealth

The seventh verse of our Torah portion describes the explosion of the Jewish population in Egypt: "The people of Israel were fruitful, increased abundantly, multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:7). The very next verse describes that a new king arose who did not recognize Joseph, i.e., turned his back on Joseph and the Jewish people. We all know what happened next with the ensuing Jewish slavery for 210 years. There are many explanations given by the commentaries why the new king refused to embrace Joseph and his great accomplishments. But those commentaries that connect the king's fury with the Jews' increased population are somehow not satisfying: What prompted the new Pharoah to swiftly turn the Jews from admired people into slaves? One commentary divides up that verse, based on a word very familiar to Jews. The last two words describing the increased population are "Me-od me-od" which translates as "exceeding mighty" or "very great numbers". But most Jews know this word from a different context. When the Torah commands the Jews to love God, the verse says, "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your me-od" (Deuteronomy 6:7). What does "me--od" in this verse signify? The Talmud (Berachot 54a) says this word indicates that a Jew should love God even with all his or her money. Thus, Pardes Yosef (Rabbi Yosef Pachnovsky) explains "me-od" in our verse in a similar manner. After the Jews multiplied, they filled Egypt by strutting around, showing off their wealth, which they had accumulated through Joseph (Pardes Yosef commentary on Exodus 1:1). Thus, "Vaya-atzmu bime-od me-od" – the Jews paraded their wealth on full display. It was this that caused all the Egyptians to become jealous and angry. Thus, it was this flaunting of their money that triggered the new king to hate Joseph and the Jews and force them to become slaves. While we all can agree that is morally wrong to flaunt prosperity or flaunt anything that others do not possess, is amassing wealth in and of itself a legitimate reason for non-Jews to hate Jews (as many do today)? Is accumulating wealth a desired Jewish goal for a traditional Jew? Is wealth in itself a Jewish value or something to be shunned?? What do the sources tell us?

Within the past century, the significance of money and wealth in the Western world has risen in importance and has become the central value in society. Today, more people admire billionaires or athletes with the largest bank accounts than other members of society.

Wealth in Judaism Seems to be Very Positive - Various sources seem to show that Judaism looks very positively on wealthy individuals and the accumulation of money. The Talmud (Eruvin 86a) says that both Rabbi Judah the Prince and Rabbi Akiva, the outstanding leaders, and scholars of their respective generations, gave great respect to wealthy individuals. This tradition and general attitude seem to have been continued by Rabbinic leaders to this very day. Wealth was deemed a positive Jewish quality in ancient times, as a person could not become a prophet unless he or she was wealthy, in addition to other required traits (Nedarim 38a). The Talmud also says (Bava Batra 175b) that to acquire Talmudic wisdom one should study the laws that deal with money and business. According to the Mishna (Avot 6:8), one of the qualities that a righteous person should possess is wealth, as it is both pleasant for him and the world. Clearly, then, wealth is a good value, which people should strive to attain.

The Negative Aspects of Wealth in Judaism - On the other hand, numerous sources point out that wealth is not such a good thing for a Jewish person to possess. The more money one has, says the Mishna (Avot 2:7), the more worry and frustration a person will also have. The Midrash (Kohelet Rabbah, 1:32) points out that a person necessarily dies with one-half of his or her desires fulfilled. How could the Midrash know that each person would have accumulated exactly half of his desires before he dies, not more and not less? The answer is that a person's desire for money and wealth is always changing. No matter how much a person accumulates, he or she always desires more. So, for example, a poor man would certainly say that he would be very satisfied with $500,000 in his bank account. However, by the time he accumulates that amount, his tastes, social circle of friends, and vistas have all changed. That person will now "need" a million dollars to satisfy his desires. But once he has accumulated that first million, with the peer pressure to have as much as the next fellow, he will "need" more. It is a never-ending cycle and only engenders frustration. Except for the one richest person in the entire world (who is also under pressure to preserve his or her top status), the desire for wealth will never be fulfilled and the satisfaction of achievement will always be outweighed by the desire for more. Thus, wealth, by itself, can never bring happiness or satisfaction.

This same concept is demonstrated in the story of Alexander the Great (Tamid 32b), who placed his gold and silver on one side of a scale and a human eyeball on the other side. No matter how much gold and silver he continued to pile on, the eyeball outweighed it. The Rabbis explained to Alexander that since the human eye has unlimited desires, it will always be "heavier" and outweigh any riches pitted against it.

It is true that Judaism views wealth as a reward from God, as we Jews God in prayer (Blessing of the New Moon, recited in the Musaf prayer on the Shabbat before the Rosh Chodesh, the holiday of the New Moon) to be granted a life of wealth. However, it is possible that one who receives wealth in this world may be denied his or her ultimate reward in the Next World, as is demonstrated by the story of Rabbi Chaninah (Taanit 25a) who was a very holy but very poor man. When he prayed for riches, he was granted his wish, became instantly wealthy, and was very happy. Then, in a dream, he saw that his golden chair reserved for him the World to Come had only two, instead of three legs, and he understood that the third leg was being used to grant him the riches in this world. The next morning, he awoke and prayed that his wealth is removed, and it was.

There is another Jewish disadvantage to becoming wealthy. The wealthier a person gets, the more a person naturally tends to forget about God and think only about himself. The classic reaction to wealth and the "good life" is in the Torah (Deuteronomy 32:15), describing the person who "kicked," i.e., complained when he became "fat", i.e., successful, as he longer appreciated God. People who work hard and accumulate riches

usually tend to think that it is through their efforts alone that they have become wealthy, and that, therefore, all the wealth belongs to them. The prophet (Chagai 2:8) teaches us that all money belongs to God, and none of it belongs to man. The entire world is God's, to begin with (Psalms 24:1), and the more one accumulates, the more one tends to forget this, as the power that accumulated wealth brings tends to go to a person's head.

One of the "lures" of wealth is that man tends to think that wealth brings security to an individual. The more wealth a person receives, the more he believes that he can depend on himself and no longer needs God. Not only is this not the Jewish way, as we know that Judaism believes that people can only truly depend on God and nothing else (Psalms 115:9), but the reality of the world, especially in the last few years, has demonstrated otherwise. No matter how much a person has accumulated and no matter where that person has invested, there is nothing that is truly secure. Many people used to think that putting their wealth in real estate was the most secure investment and that one could not lose their money in this safe venture. The Great Recession of 2008 demonstrated how wrong these people were, as both the small real estate investor and many of the wealthiest people in the world lost most of their money when the real estate market collapsed. Others used to feel and still feel today that gold was the most secure investment, especially when it became a free market and has gone up over $1500 an ounce. But just as gold once was valued at over $800 an ounce in the 1980s and then went down to under $100 an ounce, it could go down today once again just as easily. We know now that this market, too, collapsed, and gold today is worth less than half of what it was once worth. Today, it is “crypto” or "safe stocks" that we know are never really safe. Therefore, there is no such concept that money and wealth alone will bring a person security -- only God can do that.

What Then are the Real Jewish Views of Wealth -- Good or Bad? - Like all Jewish values, money, and wealth by itself are neither good nor bad. It all depends on the circumstances in which a person uses it. The when, where, and for what purpose can make any action or anything in life good or bad (see chapter on Holiness). This very concept is symbolized by the Shekel coin, which God commanded (Exodus 30:12) the Jewish people to donate for building the Tabernacle. The verse says (Exodus 30:13) "This is what you should give," and Rashi (Rashi commentary on Exodus 30:13), based on the Midrash Rabbah, says that God showed Moses a coin made out of fire. Commentaries ask what the significance and symbol of the coin of fire is, and answer that just as fire can be used for a positive purpose (heat, light, electricity) or negative purposes (building atomic bombs, crematoria in the death camps), so, too, money can be used for positive, beneficial, and moral purposes in the world, or it can be used for destructive and immoral purposes. If used properly, money can be a good force and something very positive. If used improperly, it is a negative in Judaism. Many sources attest to this.

When the Midrash (Midrash, Tehilim 118:17) describes how a person gets into the gates of heaven, it says that if a person used his or her money to feed the hungry, clothe the needy, help orphans and other acts of Tzedaka, this person will surely get into heaven. Therefore, using accumulated wealth for these purposes (and not just the accumulation of goods and vacations) has a very positive purpose. What was the prayer that the High Priest recited (Yoma 53b) as he emerged from the Holy of Holies at the holiest moment of the year on Yom Kippur? It was a prayer that there should be proper rains so that the fields should maximize their produce, i.e., that everyone should become wealthy, as wealth in that agrarian society was measured in bountiful crops. Of all the things to pray for at that spiritual moment, why did the High Priest choose this seemingly "non-spiritual" prayer? The High priest indeed wanted the people to be spiritual, but he understood that without basic money and wealth, the people would never be able to maximize their spiritual ideals, as they would be too absorbed in attaining life's necessities. All that the people and the High Priest had prayed throughout Yom Kippur day could not be attained if basic financial needs were not met. Therefore, money is good if people use it as a means to attain the spiritual.

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

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

Shemot or Exodus
Rabbi Sarel Rosenblatt

Is it the Book of Shemot or Exodus? How should we refer to the second book of the Pentateuch which we begin reading this week? Many people think that the Book of Shemot is called so because of the second word in the book – “Ve’ele shemot bnei Yisrael” (“And these are the names of the sons of Israel”); while the name Exodus (first coined by the Septuagint in the 3rd Century) reflects the main content of the book – the exodus from Egypt. However, the book’s Hebrew name, Shemot (meaning “names”) highlights an important theme which appears not only in our portion of Shemot, but throughout the entire book. In fact, this choice of name -Shemot or Exodus – reflects a deep-rooted controversy, one which has bearing on the way we understand the second book of the Torah in its entirety, and also on how we relate to the Redemption and the role of mankind in it.

The Book of Shemot is obsessive regarding people’s names. Our portion opens with the names of the sons of Israel who came down to Egypt, and the exegetes immediately ask: for what purpose? The Torah has already mentioned the names of all the sons of Yaakov coming down to Egypt at the end of the Book of Bereishit. Why is this repetition necessary?

Rashi explains that because Israel is God’s beloved people, the Torah wanted to count them again. The Ramban offers a literary explanation, saying that the Book of Shemot is not only a continuation of Bereishit, but is also an independent literary unit. As such, it necessitates an additional mention of all the names of the sons of Israel, which will serve as background for the story of the enslavement in Egypt and the ensuing redemption. However, there may be yet another reason why the names and identities of all those coming to Egypt are so important; so much so, that they are mentioned again.

A little later in the Book, the Torah tells us of Shifra and Pu’ah. Who are they? The Midrash asks why it is necessary to mention by name the two midwives in question. Is it necessary for the plot that we are told their names? (In contrast, we are not told the name of the Egyptian man who kills an Israelite; nor the name of the Israelite who was killed.) The Midrash then contends that by mentioning the midwives’ names, the Torah wishes to tell a more profound story of the characters of Yocheved and Miriam.

Not only are the names of people mentioned in our portion, but the names of God as well. When God reveals Himself to Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe insists on knowing God’s different names. This desire stems from the fact that Moshe does not wish to talk about the concept of “God” in a general or amorphic manner. He needs a name; he needs a concept that would convey a deeper and more personal understanding of the Holy One, Blessed be He. And God replies: “Thus shalt thou say to the Children of Israel – Ehyeh has sent me to you”. But immediately following this, God continues and says: “Thus shalt thou say unto the Children of Israel: The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov, hath sent me unto you” (Shemot 3, 15). God, it seems, prefers to be identified as the God of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov, and in reference to this name, and no other, He says: “This is My name for ever, and this is My memorial unto all generations.” This is how I want you to remember Me.

If so, how are names significant? The Shulchan Aruch (in Orach Chaim 56) holds that a person who walks into a synagogue and has just missed the chazzan saying Kaddish, but does hear the congregation replying “Yehe shme rabbah mevorach,” should nonetheless join the congregation in its reply. Sometimes we don’t really hear the chazzan reciting the

words of prayer, but we do hear those who have heard him and that suffices in itself, because we understand and feel the sanctity of the moment. Similarly, oftentimes we find it difficult to "hear" or feel God in our own lives, but we are still able to acknowledge the fact that there are others who do feel Him and make His word known in the world.

The Rambam in Hilchot Yeshodei HaTorah (Chapter 5) concludes that the sanctification of God's name and the desecration of God's name can often result from the good or bad behavior of observant Jews and Torah scholars because they are the ones who represent God's name in the world. In other words, God is not only manifest in the world through books and letters, but also through the people who follow in His footsteps.

This is why God instructs Moshe to tell the Children of Israel that He is the God of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov – in order to convey the message that even in Egypt, the land of bondage, when it is difficult for them to feel God or believe in His existence, they should recall their fathers, and their fathers before them, whom they know closely, and remember that these forefathers did recognize God's existence and lived an exemplary life. It follows that any person can come to recognize God through his family, his tradition and the elders of his generation. As is written: "Ask thy father, and he will inform you, thine elders, and they will tell you." (Devarim 32, 7).

In his book titled Eder Hayekar, Rabbi Kook eulogizes his father-in-law, Rabbi Eliyahu David Rabinowitz-Teomim (also known by his acronym ADeReT) who was a rabbi in Ponevezh, Mir and later in Jerusalem. Rabbi Kook also includes words of praise for Tales of Tzaddikim. A person might oftentimes look at the Torah, its noble ideas and the great demands it makes of us to observe the mitzvot and conduct ourselves with dignity – and fall into despair. How can a human live such a lofty existence? How can he achieve such levels of precision and spirituality? At such moments "let the Israelite lift his eyes to the elders of his time, to those few who have outstanding qualities", and by so doing he will not only understand and acknowledge the value of these righteous people, but will also acknowledge his own potential. After all, a righteous man is anyone who tries hard and succeeds; the exemplary person is the one who shows everyone that it is possible to succeed, and that each and every one of us has the spirit and has the strength to move forward and become better.

It follows, that, on occasion, highfalutin talk of great ideals and huge miracles that makes no mention of great people, can ultimately undermine man, make him feel little and lead him to despair. But when one meets exceptional people in the flesh and blood, one may come to believe that he, too, can obtain such levels of existence.

The name Exodus highlights the miracle of the exodus from Egypt. It relates to a specific incident that emphasizes the miracles performed by God, but does not ignore the people in whose merit we departed from Egypt. When we call the second book of the Torah Shemot, it is not only because of the word appearing in the first verse in the book, but also because we wish to highlight the people who toiled hard to preserve their Jewish identity and keep close to God; the women who decided to rebel against the king of Egypt and save the lives of children; our fathers Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov. It is in the merit of all of these people that we never forget that we, too, can become exemplary figures, great human beings.

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Yakov Haber

Small Acts, Eternal Significance [1]

In responding to Moshe's reticence to accept the Divine mission of leading the Jewish people out of Egypt, and, according to Rashi, quoting Chazal, his not wanting to sidestep his brother, Aharon, Hashem states: "Behold, Aharon, your brother, the Levite, I know he knows how to speak, and behold he [will] go out toward you, and he will see you and be happy in his heart" (Shemos 4:7). Later, the Torah records, "And Hashem spoke to Aharon, 'go toward Moshe to the desert'; and he went and met him at the mountain of G-d, and he kissed him" (ibid. v. 27). Commenting on these verses and related episodes, the Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 141) writes:

[R. Yitzchak b. Maryon stated:] When a person does a mitzvah, he should perform it with a joyous heart. If Reuven had known that the Holy One blessed be He would write concerning him, "And Reuven heard and save him (Yosef) from their hand", he would have carried him on his shoulders and brought him to his father. If Aharon had known that HKB"H would write concerning him, "and also he [will] go out toward you...", he would have gone out toward him (Moshe) with drums and dances. If Boaz had known that He would write concerning him, "And he offered her (Rus) parched corn", he would have brought fattened calves and fed her. In the past, a person would do a mitzvah and the prophets would record it; now that there are no prophets, who writes it down? Eliyahu and Mashiach with Hashem sealing it, as it is written, "Then those who fear G-d spoke with each other, and Hashem paid attention to them and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him about those who fear Him and contemplate His name" (Malachi 3:16).

At first glance, this Midrash appears to be saying that these Biblical giants, motivated by future fame, would have acted with greater zeal. But one would expect that they would certainly fulfill the dictum of Antigonus of Socho (Avos 1:3) not to serve Hashem motivated by reward! The commentaries on the Midrash offer different approaches to resolve this difficulty. Some suggest that the meaning of the Midrash is that had they known that these actions would be publicized by Hashem in the Torah, they would have magnified them in order that these acts serve as even better models to emulate. They were motivated not by the pursuit of personal glory but in order to accomplish greater moral teaching (Etz Yosef). Others suggest that in each case, there was some important concern which led them to tone down their respective actions. But had they known that Hashem would grant his "seal of approval" to their actions, they would have performed their acts of kindness more fully, as was their initial desire (Yedei Moshe, Tiferes Tzion).

Perhaps we can suggest an alternate interpretation. The Talmud (Berachos 6b with Rashi) teaches that prayer is "מדברים שעומדים ברומו של עולם", one of the most exalted matters in the world, but "בני אדם מזלזלין בה". The Baal Shem Tov is quoted as saying that "zilzul" here does not mean degradation, but not realizing the full impact. Had people realized that prayer quite literally comes directly before G-d's Heavenly throne, they would be motivated to pray with even greater energy. The Midrash is highlighting this same truth concerning all human positive action. Each mitzvah act is eternal, cosmic, and world-changing which has lasting impact not only on the performer of the action but on the entire world, both our lower one and the upper spiritual worlds. In the beautiful, encouraging words of Nefesh HaChayim (1:4):

Let no Jew say in his heart, chas v'shalom, "What am I and what is my power to effect anything in the world with my lowly action?" Rather, he should understand, know, and firmly establish in his mind that all the details of his actions, words and thoughts at every moment are not lost, chas v'shalom. How great are his actions, and how exalted they are! Each one soars [heavenward] according to its root to bring about its [particular] effect in the most exalted, elevated worlds, polishing (?) the heavenly illuminations.

But these truths are not readily apparent in our world. The far-reaching effects of every mitzvah are not immediately perceived. The Midrash therefore comments that even among great spiritual giants, the more they would reflect on the unfathomable effects of their actions - indicated by their being recorded in the eternal Torah, the more they would invest them with even greater perfection. Lest we think that the enormous effect of mitzvos is only true of those performed by the highly righteous, the Midrash concludes that the actions of every Jew are duly recorded by Eliyahu and Mashiach and brought before Hashem Who, with his seal, indicates their absolutely transcendent and eternal nature.

Furthermore, it would appear that an important distinction can be made between honor which

serves as a source of personal gratification or even of denigration of the significance of others versus recognition which serves as an important source of motivation. Chazal teach us (Nedarim 62a): "A person should not say: 'I will read [Tanach] so that they should call me "Chacham"; I will study [Mishna] so that they should call me "Rebbe"; I will analyze so I should be an elder of the study academy. Rather, learn out of love and honor will eventually come." Essentially, this passage repeats the teaching of Antigonus of Socho quoted above of the ideal of selfless service of our Creator. Surprising then is the conclusion indicating that "honor will eventually come" which seems to just substitute another - if delayed - form of ulterior motive. An analysis of the prooftexts adduced by the Gemara can lead to the conclusion that the honor which is being described is a reference to reward in the afterlife, the ultimate cleaving to G-d. But a parallel passage in Sifrei (Eikev 48) seems to clearly indicate that the honor which "will eventually come" is also in this world. This solidifies the problem raised above. Doesn't the knowledge that one will be honored for his Torah study detract from its purity?

Perhaps the answer is as briefly stated above. All human action requires some form of motivation. The purest of motives is totally selfless service of the Creator. But knowing that one's actions are significant and recognized by others - without that recognition being solely for the purpose of personal pleasure - serves as one of the most powerful incentives to continue to perform such acts and even magnify them. To be sure, Chazal speak of chessed shel emes, a true kindness consisting of actions which will not be recognized by any people down below in Olam Hazeh, but one cannot ignore the enormous drive which motivational recognition can cause.

The Gemara (Shabbos 89a) records that when Moshe went up on high, he saw Hashem tying crown to the letters of the Torah. After Hashem's rebuking Moshe for not greeting Him ("Ein shalom b'ircha?"), Moshe responds that it would be highly inappropriate for a servant to greet his master without permission. Hashem then replies, "[Nonetheless,] You should have helped Me." Rashi explains that the expectation was that Moshe should have blessed Hashem that He be successful in His activity, in a manner similar to the proverbial "yasher koach!" The difficulty with this passage is obvious. I believe I once heard from a prominent Rabbinic personality (not quoted by name here for fear of misquoting) that even though Hashem does not need any help, He was teaching us that it is part of the human experience to generally need recognition of the value of one's actions to serve as a meaningful motivation to produce even more. Since we are meant to walk in the ways of Hashem, "v'halachta bidrachav", Hashem placed into the record, so to speak, this form of behavior concerning Himself. Notwithstanding the delicate, and often confusing, differentiation between the non-ideal pursuit of personal glory and valuable reinforcement through recognition, the significance of such recognition remains central in my humble opinion.

Interestingly, Tiferes Tzion on the original Midrash quoted explains that specifically Eliyahu and Mashiach record these actions since they - the harbinger of the final redemption and the redeemer respectively - sense how each mitzvah brings the final redemption closer. May we always increase our awareness of the elevated status of even seemingly simply acts of avodas Hashem both between man and G-d and man and fellow man leading to even greater perfection in their performance ultimately leading to the final redemption!

[1] See also The Immense Effects of Mitzvot for a related treatment of the topic presented.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

About One Thing

Moshe was pasturing the flocks of Yisro, his father-in-law, the chief of Midian, and he led the flocks after the desert (free pastureland), and he came to the mountain of G-d, to Horeb. An angel of HASHEM appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush, and behold, the thorn bush was burning with fire, but the thorn bush was not being consumed. So, Moshe said, “Let me turn now and see this great spectacle why does the thorn bush not burn up?” HASHEM saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the thorn bush, and He said, “Moshe, Moshe!” And he said, “Here I am!” And He said, “Do not draw near here. Take your shoes off your feet, because the place upon which you stand is holy soil.” (Shemos 3:1-5)

Something truly amazing happened at the “Burning Bush”, whatever the “Burning Bush” means. Our sages tell us that this was not a new or spontaneous phenomenon. Rather it was around for a while. Many people passed by and noticed it but they kept on going. I guess they were in a hurry or maybe they lacked genuine curiosity.

Moshe, however, paused and oddly said to himself, “Let me turn now and see this great spectacle why does the thorn bush not burn up?” He consciously gave himself explicit permission to look and study the strange scene. The Seforno says that he employed something called in Hebrew, “Hisbonenes”- deep thinking, contemplation. He didn’t just glance at it superficially but rather he was looking and thinking deeply about a curious phenomenon.

Then, the Torah expends holy ink to tell us that at that very moment, “HASHEM saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the thorn bush, and He said, “Moshe, Moshe!” What was it that prompted HASHEM to call out to him at that moment? It seems that HASHEM saw that he had stopped what he was doing and he was studying the riddle of the “Burning Bush”. What exactly did Moshe do that made him worthy of attracting Divine attention?

The Ramchal writes in Derech Etz Chaim: “Behold a man, most of his years are spent in thinking thoughts on his businesses, business of this temporary world.

Why does he not put to heart even one hour also on thinking these other things “What is he? Why did he come to this world? Or what does the King of kings seek from him? What will be the end of his matter?”

This is the biggest and most powerful medicine that one can find against the yetzer. It is easy and its effects are great. Its fruit is many, in that a man should stand each day for at least an hour, free from all other thoughts, and to think only on this matter that I’ve said.

He should seek in his heart: “What did the early ones, the fathers of the world, that G-d desired in them? What did Moshe Rabeinu do? What did David, the Moshiach (chosen of) Hashem do, and all the Gedolim (great men) who lived before us? And he should put to his mind, “What is good for a man all the days of his life in order that he should also do the good. Then he should explore with his thoughts to know what is his situation that he is in and that he stands in relative to that which is wanted [by G-d], in the path which trod these men of G-d before him”

It’s quite amazing that the Gedolim in all generations walked on the same planet as everyone else and looked into the same words of Torah that we gaze at daily. What made them greater than everyone and anyone else? That’s a fair question! Is it only a gift of natural genius that they possessed or a privileged upbringing!? I don’t think so!

The Ramchal spells out clearly what we find here in the Torah. Their specialty was and is that they observed life and Torah with a penetrating curiosity, looking deeply into the meaning of things with a powerful concentration and a passion for the ultimate truth. That’s all!

It’s less about talent and more about focusing mental energies. Call it “Hisbonenes” or serious contemplation but that is what seems to have made all the difference for Moshe and all of Israel.

We can only marvel at what can be accomplished by taking time to pause and giving ourselves permission to master this single skill of thinking deeply about one thing!

Mizrachi Dvar Torah

Rav Doron Perz

Achieving the Unachievable

What do we do in life when we simply don't know what the right thing to do is? What do we do when there is a difficult situation but we don't know if our actions are going to bear any results?

There is an incredible insight by the Ralbag, Rabbi Levi ben Gershon, otherwise known as Gersonides, of Provence in France in the 13th century. In his commentary on the Torah regarding the actions of Yocheved around the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu, an event we all know about, he analyzes the words and gives insights in three areas: of opinions and perspectives on life; on character traits and qualities of how we ought to behave; and on the mitzvot of the Torah.

He lists a number of character traits and qualities that we can learn from the actions of Moshe Rabbeinu's family. In the first of those insights, he says he doesn't understand the behavior of Yocheved, the mother of Moshe Rabbeinu. He has been born, and three months later she cannot hide him anymore, so what does she do? She puts him into a basket to float along the Nile. What a dangerous thing to do – he could have been eaten by crocodiles, he could have drowned, there was no food in there. What was the purpose of this action?

The Ralbag says that it is true that she did not know how it would turn out. If she kept him at home, he would have faced certain death, as did all Jewish males. She knew that she had to do something to try and save her son, even if she did not know the result.

Hence, he says, we learn such an important insight – in life, we don't always know what the result of our actions is. We know if we do nothing, it will lead to oblivion, and while we may not know what the right thing to do is, we have to do something. We have to use our faculties to do the best of our abilities, to try and find a solution even if we don't know what the best solution will be. When we do what is incumbent upon us, so often the result turns out the way we would like, because all we can do is the maximum in any given situation.

This could also explain the famous Midrash about Pharaoh's daughter who, when she sees the bassinet in the bulrushes, stretches out her hand to reach it. The Midrash tells that her arm miraculously stretched and lengthened by a couple of meters to bring Moshe Rabbeinu close. Perhaps, this is what our Sages are saying here too – she could not reach the basket, why was she reaching out if it was too far? Sometimes you just have got to try and do the right thing – even if it seems beyond you, sometimes that which seems beyond us is actually within our capability.

As individuals and as a community, we don't always have all the answers and a clear solution to situations, but we know for sure that we need to do something about it. When we do what is incumbent upon us and put in our effort, even though we don't know the result, so often that which seems beyond our capability and control is actually achieved and Hashem helps us to achieve that which seems unachievable.

Sabbath :: SHEMOT

Rabbi Wein's Weekly Blog

The Torah leaves us basically unprepared for its description of the events that are recorded for us in this week's parsha. When we last left the family of Israel at the conclusion of last week's parsha of Vayechi, the Jews found themselves comfortable, affluent, protected and settled well in the land of Goshen.

The Torah does not describe to us the process by which this situation so radically changed into becoming a slave state for the Jews. It only tells us of a new king who didn't know Yosef and, for reasons not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, became a hater and persecutor of the Jews.

The Torah seems to indicate that this is almost a natural state of affairs – to be expected. The Egyptian exile begins on a high note, deteriorates into abject sorrow and attempted genocide and ends with miraculous redemption. The Torah does not dwell upon any motives for the occurrence of this pattern of events. What did the Jews do wrong? Why was the Pharaoh such a hater? What were the economic or social factors of the time that allowed for such a dramatic worsening of the Jewish position in Egypt?

The Torah addresses none of these issues. It is almost as if the Torah wishes us to understand that these things happen blindly in human history. And, particularly in Jewish history, that the attempts of historians and sociologists to explain these irrational events and behavior patterns are really useless.

As has been often pointed out, all subsequent Jewish exiles – Babylonia, Spain, France, Germany, Eastern Europe, the Moslem Middle East – all seem to eerily conform to this original Egyptian template. As usual the Torah leaves us with more questions than it provides answers for. In effect, that is why the Torah is called the book of human life.

We are also unprepared to recognize the savior of Israel in the person of Moses. We are told how he was miraculously saved from the crocodiles of the Nile by the daughter of the Pharaoh and raised in the royal court. He sympathizes with the brutalized Jewish slaves, defends them, and is forced to flee from Egypt.

We hear nothing regarding Moses for the next sixty years until he reemerges as a shepherd in Midian, married to the daughter of Yitro, the local religious chief who, at this time, is still a pagan. Hardly the resume' that one would expect for the leader of Israel, the greatest of all prophets and the teacher of all human kind.

Where did his holiness and greatness stem from, how was it developed, who were his mentors and what were his experiences over those long decades of separation from his people? The Torah gives us no clue or answer to these questions. It effectively points out that greatness oftentimes comes from unexpected sources and from people and leaders who operate outside of the usual establishment circles.

All of life is a mystery and certainly the Jewish story remains in its base an inexplicable one. This sets the stage for everything else that will now follow in the Torah. It is why the Jewish people, when accepting the Torah pledge to God that "we will do and then perhaps try to understand," if we wish to understand first we will never come to do. The Divine hand guides us but it is never subject to our rational thoughts and explanations.

Shabat shalom.

Rabbi Berel Wein

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks :: SHEMOT

Turning Curses into Blessings

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

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

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

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

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

Every tragedy begat new creativity. After the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon came the great literary prophets, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Out of the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile came the renewal of Torah in the life of the nation, beginning with Ezekiel and culminating in the vast educational programme brought back to Israel by Ezra and Nehemiah. From the destruction of the Second Temple came the immense literature of rabbinic Judaism, until then preserved mostly in the form of an oral tradition: Mishnah, Midrash and Gemara.

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

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

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

I was reminded of this unusual national characteristic by an article that appeared in the British press in October 2015. Israel at the time was

suffering from a wave of terrorist attacks that saw Palestinians murdering innocent civilians in streets and bus stations throughout the country. It began with these words: "Israel is an astonishing country, buzzing with energy and confidence, a magnet for talent and investment – a cauldron of innovation." It spoke of its world-class excellence in aerospace, clean-tech, irrigation systems, software, cyber-security, pharmaceuticals and defence systems. [2]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Efrat, Israel – "A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8).

Why is Joseph, the towering personality of the last four portions of the Book of Genesis, not considered the fourth patriarch of Israel? After all, he receives a double share of the inheritance through Manasseh and Ephraim, the two tribes who emanate from his loins – and it is he who saves his family, and thus the Jewish people, from starvation and oblivion.

Moreover, why does Moses emerge as the savior and redeemer of the Book of Exodus? What catapults this prince of Egypt to such an exalted position of Jewish leadership when he was raised in Pharaoh's palace, sports an Egyptian name (Moses means "son" in Egyptian) and seems totally disconnected from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Let us begin with Moses. I believe it was the great Professor Nechama Leibowitz, of blessed memory, who pointed out that Moses is the great fighter against injustice, whether it is perpetrated by Egyptian (gentile) against Hebrew (Exodus 2:11), by Hebrew against Hebrew, or by Midianite (gentile) against Midianite (gentile).

When we remember how God declares that He chose and loved Abraham because he would teach later generations to "keep God's way by doing acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice," and how in this manner, "all the nations of the world will be blessed through him" (Genesis 18:18,19), we realize that by fighting injustice in all three of these spheres Moses is expressing a direct line of continuity with Abraham, the first Hebrew and the recipient of God's covenant.

However, there is one category that is absent from Moses's list: an injustice performed by a Jew against a gentile. Clearly, the Bible understands the necessity of acting against injustice no matter what the ethnic profile of either oppressor or victim, since the source of Moses's commitment to strike out against injustice – in addition to whatever stories about Abraham he may have heard from his biological mother, Jochebed – was the example of his adoptive mother. This Egyptian princess flouted the cruel law of her father Pharaoh, risking her life, to save the Hebrew baby floating in an ark on the Nile River.

It is precisely this message of universality which the Bible expresses in the very first of Moses's acts against injustice, when he slays the Egyptian taskmaster beating the Hebrew: "…And he [Moses] saw an Egyptian personage [ish] beating a Hebrew personage [ish] from amongst his [Moses's] brothers. And he looked at that one [the oppressor] and at the other one [the victim], and when he realized that there was no [real] personage [ish], he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11,12).

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, explains that the Hebrew word "ish" is the highest category of the various Hebrew terms for "man." And, used to refer to both the Egyptian and the Hebrew, the word certainly conveys universal application. Moses was familiar with both Egyptian and Hebrew societies and recognized both the oppressor and the oppressed as having been important personages in their respective environments and communities.

But now that they had been thrust together as oppressor and victim, when Moses looked at each of them, he realized that each had lost his elevated status of "persona"; the very act of oppression demeans and demotes both perpetrator and sufferer, robs each of his status as having been created in the image of the Divine; there was longer an "ish" amongst them. And this would seem to be irrespective of who is the Egyptian and who is the Hebrew.

Shabbat Shalom!

Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Yosef ben Salim.

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, but 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 the 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 was 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, but rather 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.

Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parsha Insights

For the week ending 14 January 2023 / 21 Tevet 5783

Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com

Parshat Shemot :: Supersized Sacrifice

"And these are the names…" (1:1)

This is a true story.

'David' was the owner and CEO of 'The Supersized Kitchen,' a company that sold commercial kitchen supplies. At great personal expense, he decided to attend a trade show in Las Vegas to boost his client base. He took out a $50,000 loan to buy expensive radio ads in the Las Vegas area and rented a billboard to advertise his products. A day before his trip, he went to consult with his rabbi about the logistics of spending Shabbat in Vegas. "David," said his Rabbi, "I wish you'd come to me earlier because I would have advised you not to go. But if I understand correctly, you already have tickets and a reservation at the show." "More than that, Rabbi," David stammered. "I took out a loan on my house to pay for advertising in the Las Vegas area. I put up a billboard with my business name and phone number. If I don't go, I will lose a small fortune."

"That makes things more difficult. However, I think this trip could be spiritually harmful for you." David knew exactly what the rabbi was talking about. During more difficult years, David had gone through a spiritual challenge, but he had worked through it with the help of mussar sefarim (books of ethical improvement), lots of prayers, the help of his rabbi and a large dollop of help from Heaven. But by spending time in Las Vegas, a place not known for its elevated morals, he knew he was putting himself in harm's way.

"Think it over," said the rabbi. "You're stronger than you were a few years ago and I'm not telling you what to do. Sometimes when we make a great sacrifice for holiness, we are rewarded many times over from Above."

David canceled his trip. The radio ads, however, were still running, and the large billboard was suspended over one of the major highways near the show. But with no physical presence in Las Vegas, it was a colossal waste of money.

Or so he thought. Two days passed. Here and there, a potential client called David, having seen the billboard in Las Vegas, but as soon as they heard he was not in Vegas at the show, they lost interest.

Then one morning, the phone rang. "Hello? Is this the Supersized Kitchen?" asked a polished voice. "It is," David replied reluctantly, awaiting another disappointment. "This is Susan from NBC news, and we're working on a project, highlighting small businesses across the United States. We would like to highlight your niche and speak about where the business is heading, and how our team of experts can help you grow. In addition to our financial incentives, this will give your small business exposure and free advertising throughout the country. I have

researched your business online and like what I saw. Your products are unique and well-made, and your prices are very competitive."
David paused, thinking that this seemed too good to be true. "If I may ask, how did you get my number?" Susan replied, "Actually, it was just a coincidence. I was in Vegas on an assignment, and driving back to the airport, I noticed your billboard with its splashy logo. A few seconds later, I turned on the radio to hear the traffic and I heard a jingle, 'Supersized Kitchen is the only way …' I thought, this is a really strange coincidence. Maybe it's a sign which business to choose!"
Susan profiled the Supersized Kitchen on the show, highlighting the superior quality of their products. The effect was immediate. David hired two new office employees, who were busy with new clients around the clock. Before long, his fledgling business doubled, both in size and profits.
In this week's Torah portion, we begin reading of the exile in Egypt. Egypt was the most profligate immoral place in the ancient world at that time. The Jewish People were redeemed because through supersized sacrifice they held themselves aloof from the Egyptians and resisted the overwhelming impurity of the atmosphere of Egypt.
Sometimes, one of the most difficult tests we face regarding holiness involves situations to which we must expose ourselves in our pursuit of a livelihood. But we should ask ourselves every time: Do I really need to do this, do I really need to be there? Maybe there's a different way? Maybe I could 'zoom' the meeting instead, and as effectively?
And if you have to go, say to yourself, "As I head out to work, I will be on guard and vigilant to the maximum to protect myself." Give charity, say a Psalm, and Hashem will guard your way.

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Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis
Dvar Torah Shemot: Why is this book different from all other books?
11 January 2023
Why is this book different from all other books?
This shabbat we'll be commencing the reading of the book of Shemot, which some people call the book of Exodus. Interestingly, the Rambam calls the book Sefer HaGeula, the Book of Redemption, for obvious reasons.
Second
But I find most fascinating the fact that the Bal Halachot Gedolot, (the BH'G), calls Shemot by the name 'Chumash Sheini', the second of the chumashim.
We know that there are 'chamisha chumshei Torah,' five chumashim – the five books of the Torah. But why doesn't the BH'G call Bereishit 'Chumash Rishon' – the first chumash? Why doesn't he call Bamidbar, 'Chumash Revi'I', the fourth of the chumashim? Why is it only Shemot which is called the second?
Incomplete
The Netziv, in his masterful work HaAmek Davar, gives a beautiful explanation. The Netziv says as follows. The BH'G wants us to know that Sefer Bereishit is incomplete without Sefer Shemot. Sefer Shemot is the continuation of Bereishit, and the reason is because Bereishit is all about the creation and the first generations on earth, while Shemot is about the prelude to the giving of the Torah, the actual giving of it, and the housing of the Torah in the Tabernacle. The message for us therefore is that that the creation was incomplete without the existence of the Torah
So here, we are reminded yet again about the centrality of Torah in our lives. Without Torah, we are nothing. That's both at an individual level and also as far as our nation is concerned. In addition, we have a responsibility in all of our deeds and in our teachings to always reflect the values of Torah and ultimately, in this way, we will enhance our environment because we also recognise that the entire world is incomplete without Torah values.
Shabbat shalom.
Rabbi Mirvis is the Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom. He was formerly Chief Rabbi of Ireland.

Drasha Parshas Shemos - Simply Qualified
Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky
As the book of Exodus begins, it is important to ponder what catapulted Moshe (Moses) from the position of valiant citizen to national leader. The story of Moshe's youth in Egypt is hardly expounded upon in the Torah. Yes, it tells the story of his birth and his escape in the Nile River. The Torah even mentions his great vigilance in smiting an Egyptian who struck a Hebrew. But in relating those stories, it does not leave us feeling that those acts, merited Divine ordination. It tells the tale of Moshe stopping a fight between two Hebrew fellows, and how he was forced to flee from Egypt to the wilderness of Midian because of his strong stand in chastising those Jews who quarreled. All those stories show perseverance, courage, and fortitude. Yet not one of those incidents is juxtaposed with the Divine revelation that catapults Moshe into the great spiritual and prophetic leader whom we know.
Even after the event in which he saves Yisro's (Jethro) seven daughters from evil shepherds G-d is silent, there is no pronouncement of Moses' glory or appointment of a Divine role. Hashem declares Moshe's greatness in the context of a very simple serene story.
"Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law, he guided them into the wilderness, and he arrived at the mountain of G-d toward Horeb. An angel of G-d appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amidst the bush, and he saw that the bush was burning, and the bush was not consumed. Moshe looked and analyzed the sight and he questioned, "why is the bush not being burned?" (Exodus 3:1-3). It is only in that serene setting that G-d called out "Moshe, Moshe," to which Moshe replied "Here I am." The end of that story is the beginning of the Jewish nation.
Why is the act of shepherding sheep the setting for such majestic and Divine revelation? What amazing incident occurred during the shepherding? Why didn't G-d appear to Moses after his courageous act of smiting the Egyptian or after he reproached two Hebrews who were fighting? Wouldn't that setting be the ripe moment for induction into the halls of prophecy and leadership?
James Humes, a speechwriter for President Reagan, tells the story about a young recruit who was drafted into the army. During the interview, the sergeant asked him the following question, "Did you have six years of grade school education?"
"Sure thing, Sir", snapped the recruit. "I also graduated with honors from high school. I went to Yale where I received my college degree and then I did my graduate work at Colombia University, and," he added, "I received my doctorate in political science at Harvard."
The sergeant turned toward to the stenographer, smiled, and said, "Put a check in the space marked literate."
The Midrash tells us that during Moshe's tenure as a shepherd, one of the sheep ran away. He chased the sheep, he brought it back to the rest of the flock, and he carried it home. G-d looked upon him and said, "A man who cares for his sheep, will care for his people." That act catapulted Moshe to the position we know.
Acts that are bold and courageous may personify leadership, character, and commitment. People think that they that only those gallant and daring acts that will catapult them into greatness and glory. The Torah tells us that it is not so.
The Torah links Moshe's selection to Divine leadership with the simple task of shepherding. The qualifications that G-d wants are not necessarily what humans perceive. We often look for honors, accolades, achievements, and accomplishments that are almost superhuman. Hashem, on the other hand, cherishes simple shepherding, He loves care and concern for simple Jews. We may come to Him with risumis of brilliance, of courage, of valor, but He does not need that. He wants consistency, love, compassion, and, perhaps most of all, humble simplicity.
Moshe had those qualities too. It was those qualities of compassion, not the forceful qualities of attacking the Egyptian taskmaster, nor fending off evil shepherds, nor chastising combative Hebrews, that were chosen

to cast Moshe into the light of leadership. We may be bold and courageous, but without compassion for the little things, without the humility to find lost sheep, we may be simply overqualified.

Drasha is sponsored this week in memory of Joseph Fertig by Mr. and Mrs. Aaron Fertig

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi M. Kamenetzky is the Dean of the Yeshiva of South Shore.

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Shmot :: Excellent Self-Doubt

Ben-Tzion Spitz

Great doubts deep wisdom. Small doubts little wisdom. - Chinese Proverb

God appears to Moses at the Burning Bush and instructs him to confront Pharoah and get him to allow the enslaved Jewish people to travel to the desert to worship God. Moses is reluctant and declines the request, citing his unsuitability. After some back-and-forth, God is insistent but tells Moses that his brother Aaron will assist.

Moses and Aaron meet with Pharaoh, however, that first meeting is counterproductive. Not only does Pharaoh not permit his Jewish slaves the respite that is asked for, but he makes their servitude even more grueling. Moses, despondent, complains to God and says, "not only have You not helped, You've made matters worse!"

The Bat Ayin on Exodus 5:22 questions how Moses, the father of all prophets, could address God this way. How could Moses have the gall to accuse God of anything, let alone of making anything worse? He answers that if one reads the context of Moses' seeming accusation, Moses states that "ever since I came to Pharaoh," things have gotten worse. In essence, Moses is saying that it's his fault. He's saying that God couldn't affect the miraculous liberation of the Jews because Moses was a faulty and unworthy messenger. Moses was filled with self-doubt.

The Bat Ayin explains that it was exactly Moses' self-doubt that eventually made him an ideal messenger for God. God was not looking for a brash, confident, self-assured intermediary. He was looking for a quiet, humble, bashful messenger. He specifically wanted someone who didn't think they were worthy. Moses' outstanding self-debt is what made him the ideal candidate to speak for God.

Moses thought of himself as lowly and unworthy, and as a result, God bestowed the spirit of prophecy and knowledge of God upon Moses as with no other mortal before or after.

May we use our self-doubts as foundations of humility to ascend to greater knowledge of God.

Dedication -

To the 146 new species of animals and plants that were added to our planet in 2022.

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.

Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

The Most Courageous Woman in Pharaoh's Palace

Parashat Shemot 5783

Parashat Shemot, the first portion in the book of Exodus, turns from the story of our patriarchs and their families to the story of the nation. This story begins with hardship and suffering. Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, worries about the growth of the Jewish nation in Egypt and decides to enslave them. He forces the Hebrews, as the Jews were called then, to build the cities of Pithom and Raamses. But the Hebrews continue to multiply and Pharaoh decides on a very cruel solution. He issues the command to throw into the Nile all male babies born to Hebrew women.

One of the babies at risk of murder was Moses, the son of Yocheved and Amram. The fate of Moses, who would grow up to become the leader who took the nation out of Egypt, was supposed to be like that of all other male Hebrews born at that time. His mother, Yocheved, hid him for three months. But when she could no longer do so, in despair, she placed him in a tiny basket and put it among the reeds on the edge of the Nile hoping that whoever finds the baby won't realize he was a Hebrew baby and his life would be saved.

And who was it who found the baby? No less than Pharaoh's daughter. The Egyptian princess had gone down to the river with her maidservants and suddenly came upon the little basket floating in the water. She adopted the baby and raised him, despite understanding that the baby was a Hebrew baby who should legally have been killed. And thus, Moses – who was to be the redeemer of the Jewish nation – was raised in the palace of the Egyptian king.

But we would like to focus on an innocent verse that describes those first moments when Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket holding three-month-old Moses:

Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe, to the Nile, and her maidens were walking along the Nile, and she saw the basket in the midst of the marsh, and she sent her maidservant ('amata'), and she took it. (Exocus 2, 5)

The phrase "she sent her maidservant ('amata')" is interpreted by Chazal in two ways.

Rabbi Yehuda and Rabbi Nehemiya disagree (about the definition of the word amata). One says it means her arm and one says it means her maidservant. (Babylonian Talmud, Sota 12)

Later, it is explained that according to the opinion that it was her arm, a miracle occurred and her arm extended until it reached the basket and she was able to pull it toward her.

Let us look at the root of this disagreement. One opinion states that pulling Moses' basket in from the Nile was done miraculously, while the other opinion states it was done naturally by sending one of the maidservants. In reality, both come to convey important messages and they are both equally correct.

On the one hand, a person must act even when he feels alone, without help from G-d. When a person is sure his choice is moral and correct, he must do everything to implement that choice and do the right thing. Therefore, we must present Pharaoh's daughter as someone who acted naturally. She sent her maidservant to pull in the basket.

On the other hand, a person can be sure that when he acts properly, he will merit "siyata deshmaya" – help from Heaven. We may not get a miracle like Pharaoh's daughter whose arm extended to reach the basket. But help from Heaven is not necessarily miracles that deviate from the laws of nature. We must believe that when we do not despair, when we do our utmost to reach the right goals, we will merit help we didn't expect.

Pharaoh's daughter is one of the courageous women we meet in Parashat Shemot, alongside the Hebrew midwives Shifra and Pu'a, Yocheved and Miriam. The Torah presents her as a role model whose compassion led her to raising Moses in opposition to her father's cruel decrees. Pharaoh's daughter glows in the sky of heroes alongside thousands of women and men who courageously chose to follow their conscience and stand up to wicked laws. There have been such people throughout history, many also during the years of the Second World War in Europe. We call them "The Righteous Among the Nations" and the Jewish nation is forever grateful to them and learns from their altruistic acts.

The writer is rabbi of the Western Wall and Holy Sites.

Rav Kook Torah

Shemot: Moses' Mistake

Rabbi Chanan Morrison

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

"They will not believe me and they will not listen to me, because they will say, 'God did not appear to you.'" (Ex. 4:1)

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

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

Hidden Treasure of the Soul

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Message of the Signs

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

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

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

Shema Yisrael Torah Network
Peninim on the Torah - Parashas Shemos
פרשת שמות תשפ"ג
הבה נתחכמה לו פן ירבה
Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous. (1:10)

Pharaoh no longer remembered how Yosef had brilliantly led the nation through a major economic crisis. He looked around and saw that the immigrant family of seventy Jews that had originally come from Canaan had now become a nation of thousands, growing exponentially. They had become too numerous and too strong. Something had to be done about them. He foolishly thought that he could contend with Hashem and control the destiny of *Klal Yisrael*. He was clearly wrong.

When our nation received the Torah at *Har Sinai*, the Torah records the event. *Va'yehi kol ha'shofar holeich v'chazeik me'od*, "The sound of the *shofar* grew continually much stronger" (*Shemos* 19:19). In his commentary, *Harcheiv Davar*, the *Netziv, zl,* derives a powerful and critical lesson which serves as a beacon for understanding the inordinate power of *Torah She'Ba'al Peh*, the Oral Law/*Mishnah* and *Talmud*. He writes: "The sound of the *shofar* grew continually much stronger. The sound of the *shofar* at Sinai was different than the ordinary sound of the *shofar*, which becomes weaker as the sound continues. (It starts off strong and diminishes.) The sound of the *shofar* (at Sinai) was strong initially, and its sound became stronger as it continued. This was to teach *Am Yisrael* that the sound of *Torah She'Ba'al Peh* will become stronger and more pronounced with time. This sound emerged from the dark, awesome smoke (that encompassed the mountain). This alludes (a portent for the future) to the idea that smoke is a metaphor for darkness, adversity, troubles, in which a person does not see his way out. He has no idea what will happen. So, too, will the sound (commensurately) become stronger (as occurred during the period of *Bayis Rishon*, the First *Bais Hamikdash*). It was only when Yoshiayahu *Hamelech* saw the bitter *galus*, exile, did he turn to the *Leviim,* the tribe most identified with Torah study, to raise the banner of *Torah She'Ba'al Peh*. This pattern has continued throughout our exile, whereby the greater the adversity that we encounter, the greater the response of *Torah She'Ba'al Peh*."

Horav Chizkiyahu Mishkovsky, Shlita, observes that the farther (in time) that we move away from *Har Sinai*, the stronger and more proficient the sound of the *shofar*/Torah study. We have only to look around at the multitude of *sefarim*, volumes of analytical commentary on the *Talmud* and *halachah,* that have emerged in the last few decades. The *Netziv* teaches us, *V'kaasher yaanu oso, kein yirbeh v'kein yifrotz*; "But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase and so it would spread out" (Ibid. 1:12). The more that is piled on us, the greater the challenge and adversity, the greater is our response with Torah.

The *Talmud Bavli*, Babylonian *Talmud*, which is the staple upon which *halachah* is based, was redacted when the Romans issued vicious decrees against us. The *Talmud Yerushalmi*, on the other hand, was not compiled during a period of misfortune. Thus, it is not studied as much.

The author of the *Shaagas Aryeh, Horav Aryeh Leib Gunzberg, zl*, also authored two other volumes of commentary: *Turei Even* and *Gevuros Arye*. Noticeably, the second two volumes did not achieve as much reader attention as his magnum opus, *Shaagas Aryeh,* which is a staple in the *yeshivah* world. *Horav Chaim Brisker, zl,* attributed this phenomenon to the fact that the author wrote the *Shaagas Aryeh* while he was suffering from abject poverty, when he could not even afford paper, so that he wrote on the walls of his decrepit house. He wrote the other two *sefarim* when he was the distinguished *Rav* of Metz, with a decent salary and a home which was suited for an individual of such prominence. The more arduous the adversity, the more robust the response.

כי לא כנשים כמצריות העבריות ... בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת וילדו
Because the Hebrew women are unlike the Egyptian women … before the midwife comes to them, they have given birth. (1:19)

Pharaoh had instructed Shifrah and Puah, the Jewish midwives, to murder the male infants. They, of course, did not listen to the evil despot. claiming that by the time they arrived at the homes of the Jewish women, the children had been born. *Horav Shabsi Frankel, zl,* quotes an original thought from his father-in-law, *Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl,* which presents us with a deeper meaning to the dialogue that ensued between Pharaoh and the *me'yaldos,* midwives.

Understandably, these holy women were not prepared to commit the unthinkable. Their task was to bring on life, not to shorten it. They had a logical response to Pharaoh's accusation. He cites the *Echad Mi Yodea*, "Who Knows One?" a song which is recited at the end of the *Seder*. This song culminates (with *Chad Gadya,* which follows it) the *Seder* ritual. After spending hours intensely transmitting the story of *yetzias Mitzrayim*, our exodus from Egypt, we involve ourselves in a

most important examination: Why were we, the Jewish people, privileged to experience the liberation from Egypt? Furthermore, will we once again be worthy of experiencing redemption at the End of Days? The song intimates our singularity, our distinctiveness, for the past and for the future.

It begins, "Who Knows One?" Of course, Hashem is our answer. Our belief in the Almighty elevates us above the rest of the world. This litany continues with each number representing our uniqueness in ancestry, commitment to Torah study and *mitzvos*. One entry, however, begs elucidation: *Tishah mi yodea*, "Who knows nine?" *Tishah yarchei leidah*, "Nine months of birth" (*leidah* means birth, although, in this context, it is translated as pregnancy). The question is obvious: What is so special about our people that we specify that we have nine months of pregnancy? This is a period of time that applies to all women across the board. Furthermore, why does the *paytan*, ritual poet, author of the *Haggadah*, use the word *leidah*, which means birth, as opposed to *ibur*, which means pregnancy?

The *Rav* cites *Ramban (Shemos* 1:10) who explains that while Pharaoh personally had no problem with wholesale genocide of the male infants, he knew that it would engender a negative reaction from his populace. They would not buy into it. They were, after all, a cultured nation who would never resort to such violence and bigotry. He commenced his plan by conscripting the "immigrants" as workers. This was part of the acceptance policy levied against foreigners to a country. Obviously, in short time, the Jews discovered that Pharaoh was acting as a despot whose true intentions were to eliminate the Jewish people.

Pharaoh presented the midwives with a cunning rationale (according to *Rav* Yosef Nechemiah). He said, "The Jews do not really want more children. Why would they choose to bring them into a life of servitude? The women became pregnant as a result of passion. If a woman's fetus were to be stillborn, she would not be distressed. In other words, Pharaoh alluded to the idea that these were unwanted pregnancies. They would actually be performing a service to the parents by "limiting" their families. (Pharaoh's diabolical intention has, unfortunately, found purchase in today's irreverent society.)

The midwives replied with a lesson concerning Jewish marriage and family life. In the Jewish tradition, marriage is a means to fulfill Hashem's command that we propagate in order to establish the foundation for future generations. [This concept applies to any form of propagation, including programs such as spiritual outreach. By helping a Jew return to the fold, we participate in his spiritual rebirth.] Jewish women are unlike Egyptian women, whose desire is purely physical and selfishly motivated. The Jewish woman marries for a purpose, to give, to produce, to participate in structuring the Jewish nation. She lives for her children. The love Jewish women have for their children begins at conception, because they sense the seeds of the future *Klal Yisrael* implanted within them. They pine for the moment when they can devote themselves wholly to their children. Thus, every child is of unique significance, even if it means bringing him/her into a life of servitude. They are carrying out Hashem's Will. That is all that matters.

This concept is alluded to with the words, *tishah yarchei leidah*. For the Jewish people, the nine months of pregnancy are nine months of birth. The love they have for their child begins at conception, as if the baby had already been born.

וימת מלך מצרים ויאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה ויזעקו

It happened that the king of Egypt died, and *Bnei Yisrael* groaned because of the work, and they cried out. (2:23)

What about the Egyptian king's death provoked *Bnei Yisrael's* pain and initiated their crying out? *Horav Yitzchak, zl, m'Volozhin* explains that as long as Pharaoh was alive, the Jews attributed all of their *tzaros*, troubles, to his wicked leadership. They hoped that when he would hopefully leave this world, the evil decrees would end. When he died, however, and the evil continued unabated, they realized that they could only turn to Hashem. The nature of man is to attribute everything that occurs in his life to natural causes and place their hopes on its positive conclusion. The believing Jew, however, places his trust in Hashem and seeks to find His guiding hand. One should live his life in such a manner that he understands that everything comes from Hashem, thus, He is the One to whom we should turn.

Horav Asher Weiss, Shlita, relates that a woman suffering from extreme poverty came before the *Divrei Chaim (Sanzer Rav, zl*) weeping bitterly. She pleaded with the holy *Rebbe* to intercede on behalf of her gravely ill son. The *Divrei Chaim* told her, "If you give me one thousand *reinis* (the currency of the day), I guarantee you that your son will merit a *refuah sheleimah*, complete recovery."

The woman was incredulous and expressed her displeasure: "How can I pay so much money? I am lucky to have some coins to live and support my family. The sum the *Rebbe* is demanding from me is not within my reach. Please forgo the exorbitant sum. I have nothing." The *Rebbe* refused to reconsider, "I must have the complete sum, or I cannot promise you that your son will survive."

When the woman heard this final response and saw that the *Rebbe* was immovable, she raised her hands in desperation and exclaimed, "If the *Rebbe* will not help me, then I have no recourse but to turn to Hashem." The *Rebbe* countered, "This is what I wanted to hear. I cannot help you. Only Hashem has the power to heal your son. Unless you acknowledge this verity, you are assured of nothing. Now that you have accepted Hashem as the only resort, I will give you my blessing for a *refuah sheleimah*."

All too often, we exhaust all avenues of salvation, while ignoring the only One who has the means for effecting a positive response to our needs.

ויאמר ד' ראה ראיתי את עני עמי אשר במצרים

Hashem said, "I have, indeed, seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt." (3:7)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah Shemos* 3:2) note the double usage of the word *ra'oh*, see (*ra'oh ra'isi*). They explain that Hashem told Moshe *Rabbeinu*, "Moshe, you see a *re'iyah achas*, one sight, but I see two *reiyos*, two sights. You see the nation coming to *Har Sinai* and receiving the Torah. I, too, see them coming to *Sinai* and receiving My Torah. (This is the meaning of the first *ra'oh.*) However, I also see the sight of the incident of the *eigel*, Golden Calf." Hashem's message to Moshe is intriguing and surely laden with profound meaning. Simply, Hashem intimated to Moshe that he (like all human beings) does not see the whole picture. The rest of the story, which is played out over time, might not have the same happy ending as we might expect based upon the beginning of the story. Alternatively, Hashem told Moshe, "You look at the positive (accepting the Torah), which is critical for a leader to see. However, I must take in the after effects of the positive. Will it remain this way, or will their later actions indicate that the "positive" was not as laudatory as it appeared?

Horav Yosef Nechemiah Kornitzer, zl, offers a novel understanding of Hashem's words. Moshe was reluctant to accept the reign of leadership over the future nation of *Klal Yisrael*. His response to Hashem was, *Shelach na b'yad tishlach*; "Send whomever You will send" (*Shemos* 4:13), which meant, "Send my brother, Aharon (*HaKohen*). He already functions as Your prophet; he has the respect of the people, and they will accept and listen to him." Moshe was contending that he was clearly not Hashem's first choice, since other individuals were better suited for the leadership role. Furthermore, since he was not destined to enter *Eretz Yisrael*, the leader who would accompany them out of Egypt should be the same one that would escort them into the Promised Land.

"The words, *shelach na b'yad tishlach*, 'Send whomever you will send,'" explains the *Rav*, "are a reference to Eliyahu *HaNavi*, regarding whom it is written, *Hinei anochci sholeiach lachem es Eliyahu HaNavi lifnei bo yom Hashem ha'gadol v'ha'norah*; 'Behold, I send you Eliyahu *HaNavi* before the coming of the great and awesome day' (*Malachi* 3:23)." Eliyahu will ultimately be sent to lead the people during the Final Redemption. Why should he not commence the Redemption by leading *Klal Yisrael* out of Egypt?

Hashem replied that Eliyahu is a *kanai*, zealot, which he demonstrated against the *neviei ha'baa*l, false prophets of the *baal* idol. *Klal Yisrael* are going to sin egregiously with their creation of a molten

idol. It is critical that the individual who is their leader be one who will stand up and plead and even fight for Divine forgiveness for them. A *kanai* will not be as tolerant.

ועתה הנה צעקת בני ישראל באה אלי

And now, behold! The outcry of *Bnei Yisrael* has come to Me. (3:9)

There is *tefillah*, prayer, and there is *tze'akah*, crying out, yelling or effusive prayer laden with emotion and expression. *Tze'akah* is the prayer one offers when he is literally up against the wall with nowhere to go. He sees no way out, no form of salvation. Imagine one is walking in a forest when he suddenly chances upon a bear. He screams. Will the scream make a difference? Bears are really not moved by the screams of a human being. Nonetheless, when one realizes that this is it, he has no way out – he screams. *Klal Yisrael* was in Egypt suffering from every form of persecution the diabolical Egyptians could devise. The Jews were certainly not on an appropriate spiritual plane, having sunken to the forty-ninth level of *tumah*, ritual defilement. They thought that assimilation would garner further acceptance for them within Egyptian society. They were wrong. As far as the morally bankrupt Egyptians were concerned, they were still Jews. They cried; they screamed. They had come to the end of the road.

Chazal (*Bava Metzia 85a*) relate that *Rebbe*, *Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi*, suffered terribly during the last years of his life. He had everything: money, glory, Torah erudition and achievement, and he was in debilitating pain. The ironic part was that this was Heavenly decreed due to an incident that had occurred. A calf being brought to the slaughter broke away and attempted to find refuge with *Rebbe*. The venerable redactor of the Mishnah, who made *Torah She'Baal Peh* accessible to us, replied, *Leich, ki l'kach notzarta*, "Go, because this is for what you were created." Since he showed no compassion for the calf, he was stricken with pain for the rest of his life.

Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, zl, asks: What did *Rebbe* do wrong? He responded with the truth. The calf was created to serve as food for human consumption. He explains that if someone relies on you, if someone comes to you and pleads for help, you may not just send him away to his death. You must find some way to help him. So, too, does Hashem respond to us when we are *tzoeik*, cry out with extraordinary emotion. "Hashem, we can turn to no one but to You! Please help us! Without You, we are gone!" Surely, if we express ourselves with genuine sincerity, He will listen.

Horav Yechiel Meir Tzuker, Shlita, relates a powerful incident that occurred in Yeshivas Knesses Chizkiyahu in K'far Chassidim. It was right before *Tekias Shofar*. The *Mashgiach* of the *Yeshivah*, the saintly *Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl*, was ascending to the lectern to address the yeshivah, to arouse and inspire them before the *tekios*. Suddenly, out of the blue, *Rebbetzin* Renah Mishkovsky came running in to the *bais hamedrash*; with a tear-stricken face, she ran over to the *Aron Kodesh*. *Horav* Dovid and Renah Mishkovsky lived in the dormitory with their very young son, Itzele (named for his grandfather, *Horav Itzele Peterberger, zl).* Itzele was very ill, and the doctors, who despaired for his life, had sadly sent him home to leave this world in his own bed.

Rebbetzin Renah saw that the end was near. She galvanized what little strength she had and opened the doors of the *Aron HaKodesh*. In front of the *Mashgiach* and the entire *yeshivah*, she cried out with bitter tears, pleading with Hashem to grant her young son a reprieve. She finished weeping, closed the doors, and respectfully backed away from the *Aron HaKodesh*.

The *Mashgiach's shmuess*, ethical discourse, was no longer necessary. The *yeshivah* had its most powerful inspiration. He banged on the lectern and called out: *Tekios*! The cries of a Jewish mother were all the inspiration they needed.

Va'ani Tefillah

יענך ד' ביום צרה ישגבך שם אלקי יעקב – *Yaancha Hashem b'yom tzarah, yisagevcha shem Elokai Yaakov*. May Hashem answer you on the day of distress; may the name of Yaakov's G-d make you impregnable.

On the day of distress? The *Midrash (Devarim Rabbah* 2:17) teaches, "Hashem answers some prayer after forty days (of prayer). He answers some prayer after twenty days. He answers other prayer after one day. He answers yet other prayer after twelve hours." In any event, to ask/demand that the response be on the day of distress skips over the various levels of prayer. Furthermore, it seems that the response we ask for transcends even prayer.

The *Maggid, zl m'Dubno* explains that personal prayer requires personal merit; thus, it can take some time to effect a positive response. In this prayer, we supplicate Hashem in the merit of Yaakov *Avinu*. He erected a *Mizbayach*, altar, to the G-d "that answers me on my day of distress (*Bereishis* 35:3)." Thus, Hashem answers immediately on the *yom tzarah*, because we are relying on the *tefillos* of our Patriarch, Yaakov, whose *tefillos* preceded ours. *Yaancha Hashem b'yom tzarah*. Why? Because *yisagevcha Shem Elokai Yaakov*. He responds due to Yaakov's merit.

לע"נ האשה החשובה רבקה טובא דבורה בת ר' חיים יוסף מאיר ע"ה נפ' כ"א טבת התש"ס
ע"ה נדבת מנחם שמואל ורויזא דבורה סלומון In memory of Mrs. Toby Salamon ת.נ.צ.ב.ה

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https://www.theyeshiva.net/jewish/7312/the-birth-of-greatness

The Birth of Greatness

The Psychological Burning Bush

Rabbi YY Jacobson

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Moses' Story

Unlike his brethren suffering in slavery, Moses had been raised in the palace of the Pharaoh, and by the king's own daughter, Batya. A favorite of the king, as a child, he was not spared luxury. Moses could have easily chosen to isolate himself in the aristocratic life of a prince, oblivious to the hardship and suffering of the Hebrews, targeted for abuse and annihilation. But Moses did not.

Moses leaves the palace, choosing to spend his time comforting and bringing relief to the Jewish slaves. Quickly, he finds himself unable to stand idly in the face of injustice. To protect an innocent man being beaten senselessly by his Egyptian taskmaster, Moses kills the tormenting master, and then, to escape capital punishment, flees to the quiet land of Midyan. There, he meets his wife, Tziporah, the daughter of one of the wealthiest and most influential men in town, Jethro, and Moses settles down into the favorite biblical occupation, shepherding.

It seems that life has worked out for Moses. The horrors of Egypt are a thing of the past. True, Egypt is a place of unspeakable crimes against humanity, but what can Moses, or for that matter what can anyone, do about that? Moses' life in Midyan, hundreds of miles away from Egypt, is now secure, domesticated, and peaceful. He builds a family and grows old.

Moses is now eighty years of age. By all calculations, a good time to retire.

But then everything changes. And it has something to do with a burning bush.

A Burning Bush

One day, Moses is shepherding his father-in-law's sheep, when suddenly, he witnesses a bush, "burning with a heart of fire," yet the bush is not being consumed, it is not being transformed to ash. Moses says, "Let me turn aside, and see this great vision! Why is the bush not being consumed?"

The Torah describes the following scene:[1]

"G-d saw that Moses turned to see, so He called out to him from amidst the bush. 'Moses! Moses!' And he said: Here I am."

G-d tells Moses that "I have heard the pain and screams of the children of Israel in Egypt, and I have decided to save them." Now it is you, Moses, who I will send to Pharaoh, and you will take my nation out of Egypt. Moses becomes the greatest leader of all times, liberating a people from oppression and giving the world the Torah, paving a road in the jungle of history.

A Turn of the Head

The Rabbis in the Midrash, always sensitive to nuance, focus our attention on the enigmatic words: "G-d saw that Moses turned to see, so He called out to him from amidst the bush." Clearly, G-d called out to Moses only because Moses turned to see the sight of the burning bush.

But what exactly did Moses do? What does it mean that he "turned to see?"

On this there is a Midrashic argument:[2] Rabbi Yochanan says that Moses walked five steps[3] approaching the burning bush. Reish Lakish says that Moses did not take any steps at all; he simply turned his head to gaze at the bush, and when G-d saw that he turned his head in that direction, he called out to him.

What is the motif behind this strange argument?

The Light Bulb Moment

All biblical tales are not merely historical tales of the past, but contemporary lessons for our own lives. The story of Moses, the most important biblical figure, is no different.[4] It is a timeless blueprint for our own inner journey.

Just like Moses, whose life at this point was slow and tranquil, far away from Pharaoh and the enslaved Israelites, and then suddenly is confronted with his burning bush and a new mission to change the destiny of mankind, we too often find ourselves far away from our destiny. We are living in our own orbit, "shepherding our own flock," minding our own business, in our inner psychological wilderness.

But then, suddenly, we experience a "burning bush," or a "light bulb moment." A fire is ignited in our hearts, a light bulb goes off in our minds. Our G-d within speaks to us about a larger mission in life.

Mark Twain said, "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." It is the day when you suddenly see your full potential and hence your full responsibility to both yourself and those around you. It is a moment of clarity when you know exactly what you are capable of, and what you were created for. It is when you shoulder full responsibility for your destiny.

But how can I know that the voice calling me is real? How do I know that it is not a fantasy created by an imagined ego, a childish dream, divorced from reality? How do I know that this is not the hallucination of a lunatic, or trauma protecting itself, but my personal call to greatness? Maybe I need to go to a psychiatrist or a therapist instead of returning to Egypt and confronting my Pharaoh.

The answer is when the fire burns and burns, yet never consumes your bush. The light bulb never dims. The voice inside me never falls silent. Then I know that this is not a fantasy, but a mission. My inner fire and secret passion, my 'heart of fire,' can never be extinguished, can never be placated by any alternatives. I can run, but I cannot hide, because the fire will continue to burn inside me.

Running From Your Burning Bush

And yet, many of us do not turn to see as the bush burns with a never-ending flame. We don't want to get disturbed. We have appointments to catch, emails to answer, bills to pay, goals to complete. Who has time and energy for a bush which refuses to stop burning?

We are tempted to look away, run away, to pretend we never saw what we saw. We don't like entertaining ideas that might severely shake up the status quo.

The greatness of Moses was that he turned to see the bush. According to one sage, Rabbi Yochanan, he actually walked five steps toward the flames—corresponding to the five layers of human consciousness: Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah, Chayah, Yechidah—the biological, emotional, intellectual, transcendental, and undefined quintessence ("quint" in Greek means five[5]) of the soul, beyond form or description. According to Rabbi Yochanan, Moses approached the burning bush with every fiber of his being, with every aspect of his identity.[6]

But Reish Lakish argues. Moses did not even take a single step. There is no need to even take one step toward the bush. All G-d wants is for you to turn your head and notice the bush ablaze. Just be attentive enough in life that when the light bulb moment occurs, you will at least notice it; you will not repress it with a glass of alcohol, a TV show or a rib steak.

That is for some the most difficult and therefore most rewarding step: to turn their heads and see the moment.[7] And when you do turn your head, when you do tune in to the moment, you will be able to hear the call. Your inner Divine consciousness, your inner soul, will summon you: Moses! Moses! Declare "Hinani!" I am here. And listen, with your soul's ear, to your mission, the mission of your life.

Three Excuses

But Moses is not easy to convince. He begins arguing with G-d[8]: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Who am I that I should take the Jews out of Egypt?" And when G-d does not desist, Moses tries a different approach: "But the people, they won't believe me; they will ask me 'who is this G-d in whose name you speak!'" But G-d insists. Moses then speaks of the fact that he is not a man of words; his communication skills are compromised. Finally, Moses begs, "Please G-d, send in the hand of the right person." G-d gets upset at Moses and promises him that He will be with him throughout the mission. Only then does Moses finally accept his calling. Once he accepted it, he never looks back again. The march toward redemption begins.

This is true in our lives too. There are three major handicaps that prevent people from finding themselves and living their lives to the fullest; there are three rationalizations for why we shirk our greatest responsibilities; three forms of paralysis.

Moses first says "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? Who am I that I should redeem the Jews?" In our vocabulary this is the response of insecurity. We are afraid, we feel inadequate to meet the challenges of life. We blame ourselves or our mothers: I am helpless, I am incompetent, I am a victim, I stutter, I can't communicate, nobody likes me, I am a small guy, a nobody. But G-d does not accept: To shy from responsibility due to feelings of inadequacy is not an act of humility, but one of cowardice, because it excuses inaction, avoids accountability, and most importantly it allows you to remain mediocre and for a people to remain enslaved. How can you allow your mediocrity to allow suffering of innocent people?

Another approach is not to blame ourselves, but to blame everyone else. In the words of Moses, "But the people won't believe me! They will say who is this G-d in whose name you speak; what will I respond to them?" We often claim that we are ready, but what can we do, the world is not ready for us! We blame our spouses, our in-laws, our family, our community, the media, the government, the masses—for being unresponsive. We blame our families for being unappreciative and our communities for not respecting us. We blame everyone but ourselves.

Finally, there is a third excuse: Perfectionism. If I can't be perfect, then I don't want to be anything at all. This is encapsulated by Moses' last argument: "G-d! Send in the hand of the right person." Moses, says the Midrash,[9] was referring to Moshiach, the one intended to redeem us conclusively, permanently, and for all of eternity. Here Moses is saying, "I know that I am capable of fulfilling this mission to the fullest, and I know that the people will be responsive and will heed my call, but if my redemption is to be temporary, then I don't want to bother with it at all! It is either all or nothing!"

But G-d, once again, disagrees. Perfectionism, when misused, is not a strength, but a weakness. It is the enemy of progress.

Your Struggles

How do I know where my unique mission lies?

The answer, again, is in the thorn bush. The call to Moses did not come from any bush; it came from a thorn bush. Thorns represent pain, where I was pricked, where I was hurt, where I have been left scarred. Many times it is specifically that area where I have been hurt deeply but have persevered, where I struggle the most, where the inner battle rages most intense, that can become my unique strength and contribution. My 'heart of fire' rages within and grows out of my own inner thorn bushes.

You, and only you, are equipped with your unique mission to open hearts, to move people to action, to keep people from losing hope, to help people forgive themselves and others, to help people laugh at their humanity, to save a soul, kindle a heart, to inspire a nation, to touch a community, to spread goodness and kindness, to share the light of Torah and Mitzvos with people around you, to reveal the energy of redemption in your part of the world.

Can we see the burning bush? Will we turn around? That is the question I must answer in my life; and you must answer in yours.[10]

[1] Exodus 3:4.
[2] Midrash Rabah Shemos 2:6.
[3] In Midrash Tanchuma here the version is "three steps," not five steps. The midrashic commentators discuss this discrepancy, suggesting various explanations. Cf. footnote #6.
[4] The Chassidic masters teach that there is a spark of Moses in each of us (Tanya chapter 42.) Hence, all of Moses' experiences apply on some level to us.
[5] Quintessence means the fifth essence. The ancient Greeks taught that there were four elements, or forms, in which matter could exist: fire, air, water, and earth. Then there was the fifth element known as the fifth essence (quintessence) ether, more subtle and pure than fire. Now the word stands for the essential principle or the most subtle extract, the pure, undiluted essence of an existence that can be obtained. These five dimensions are discussed in many works of Midrash and Kabbalah.
[6] This also explains why according to one version in Midrash, Moses took three steps, since in many sources, the five levels of the souls are generally divided into the three levels of "naran," Nefesh, Ruach, Neshamah.
[7] This is similar to the idea the Lubavitcher Rebbe once expressed about prayer. Prayer is a ladder of many rungs. There are many different levels and layers we explore during prayer. But the foundation of all of them is "shtelen zeich davenen," the person tearing himself away from everything and tuning-in to the mental state of communicating with the Divine. That in a way is deeper than all of the high levels following during the actual prayer (Likkutei Sichos vol. 2 Parshas Matos Massei.)
[8] Exodus 3:11.
[9] Midrash Lekach Tov. Pirkei Derabi Eliezer ch. 40.
[10] My thanks to Rabbi Avraham David Shlomo (Cape Town, South Africa) for his help in preparing this essay.

Ohr Somayach Insights into Halacha
For the week ending 7 March 2020 / 11 Adar II 5780
Understanding Shnayim Mikra V'Echad Targum
Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

There is a well known Gemara in Brachos[1] that states "A person should always complete his [study of the] parasha with the congregation[2] - [by studying] shnayim mikra v'echad targum. Anyone who does this will have extended days and years." Learning the text of the weekly parasha twice along with the targum once (keep reading for explanation) is a segulah for long life.[3]

What many do not know is that this statement of Chazal is actually codified in halacha.[4]

The Baal HaTurim[5] famously comments that this halacha can be gleaned from the first verse in Parashas Shemos: The parasha begins "V'aileh shemos Bnei Yisrael" - "And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael". The Baal HaTurim remarks that this passage stands for (roshei teivos) -'V'adam asher lomed haseder shnayim mikra v'echad targum b'kol naim yashir, yichyeh shanim rabos aruchim l'olam' or "And the person who learns (or sings) the weekly parasha shnayim mikra v'echad targum in a sweet straight voice, will live many long years (have an extremely long life).

Translating 'Targum'

Now that we have seen that that such a great reward[6] awaits those who strictly adhere this, there is only one thing left to ascertain: What precisely is the Mitzvah? Obviously, it means to recite the weekly Torah portion twice, plus targum once; but what exactly does targum refer to, and what is its purpose?

This is actually a dispute among the Rishonim. Several are of the opinion that the purpose of targum is that it is not just a simple translation, but also adds layers of explanation to every word.[7] Consequently, according to this opinion, the purpose of reading the parasha with targum is to learn the Torah in a way that allows us to understand it better. Practically, according to the Tur and Shulchan Aruch, this means that targum here would mean learning the parasha with Rashi's commentary, as it is the best commentary to unlock the pshat of the Chumash.[8]

Others maintain that the halacha is referring to the targum as we know it: Targum Onkelus, as the Gemara in Megillah[9] states that this translation of the Torah was actually given to us by Moshe Rabbeinu.[10] The Rema[11] held that therefore reading Targum Onkelus is like reading from the Torah itself, and hence is preferable for performing this Mitzvah. Accordingly, by reading the parasha with its original targum, we are re-presenting the Torah weekly in the same manner as it was given at Har Sinai.

Some opine that this is Rashi's own shittah when it comes to shnayim mikra v'echad targum. The result of this machlokes is that Rashi would maintain that Targum Onkelus is preferable while the Rosh was of the opinion that Rashi's commentary is preferable. That means according to Rashi, ironically, it's possible that one might not even fulfill his obligation of targum if he learns Rashi's own commentary![12]

The Shulchan Aruch[13] cites both opinions and rules that one can fulfill his obligation with either one, Targum Onkelus or Rashi. However he concludes that it is preferable to do both, as that way one can satisfy both interpretations.[14]

The Taz explains that if someone does not understand either one, he can read the original Tzennah U'Renna in German (presumably Yiddish) to enable his understanding, and with this he fulfills his targum obligation. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch and Mishnah Berurah rule this way as well. In this vein, several contemporary authorities, including Rav Moshe Feinstein and Rav Moshe Sternbuch, ruled that nowadays one may perform his targum obligation by reading an English translation of Rashi's commentary, if that is the way one best understands it.[15]

Shnayim Mikra before the Seudah

The Shulchan Aruch[16] rules that the proper time to fulfill this Mitzvah is from the Sunday of the week when a given parasha is read (although some, including the Mishnah Berurah, maintain that one may already start on Shabbos afternoon after Mincha),[17] over the course of the whole week and preferably finishing before the Shabbos day meal.[18] However, it is important to note that this is only Mitzva Min Hamuvchar. The Mishnah Berurah rules that one should not push off his Seudas Shabbos past Chatzos HaYom just to finish shnayim mikra before the seudah.[19] Likewise, if one is having guests over for the seudah, he should not make them wait just so he can finish shnayim mikra before the seudah.[20]

However, there are many authorities who hold that optimally, it is preferable to complete shnayim mikra on, or at least finish, by Erev Shabbos.[21]

What time is Mincha?

The Shulchan Aruch adds that if one has not yet finished shnayim mikra before the seudah, then he has "until Mincha" to finish, and if not, the Wednesday of the next week, and concluding that b'dieved one has until Shmini Atzeres / Simchas Torah to catch up for the whole year.[22]

The Shulchan Aruch's enigmatic choice of words led to an interesting dispute among authorities: What did the Shulchan Aruch mean by "until Mincha"? Some posit that he was referring to a personal Mincha, meaning that a person can finish this Mitzvah up until he himself actually davens Mincha.[23] Others maintain that his intent was until the time of Mincha, meaning Mincha Gedolah, the earliest time that one may daven Mincha.[24] A third approach is that it refers to the time when Mincha is davened in the local shul.[25] A fourth opinion is that it is referring to Mincha Ketana,[26] two and a half halachic hours before shkiyah, the optimal time for davening Mincha.[27] Interestingly, there does not seem to be any clear cut consensus on this issue.[28]

One Small Step For Man…

Another issue that raises much debate among the halachic decisors is what the proper order and way to fulfill shnayim mikra v'echad targum is, and at which points one may stop; whether pasuk by pasuk, section by section, parasha by parasha, or all at once. There does not seem to be a clear consensus on this either.[29] Although for many, to clear a time block to do shnayim mikra at once may be difficult, it might be a good idea to follow the Mishnah Berurah's[30] advice and employ the Vilna Gaon's method of immediately after one's dailyShacharis, doing a small part every day (i.e. on Sunday do up to Sheini; on Monday up to Shlishi,

etc.). By following this technique one will have finished this Mitzvah by Shabbos, every week.

Just Do It!

Many contemporary authorities are at a loss to explain the perceived lackadaisicalness that many have concerning this Mitzvah. These Gedolim, including Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner, and Rav Ovadia Yosef, zichronam l'vracha, as well as did yblch"t Rav Moshe Sternbuch, and, stressed its significance,[31] and decried the fact that it seems to have fallen into disuse, with several averring that there is even a Mitzvah of chinuch for a parent to teach shnayim mikra's importance to his children![32] So, although there is halachic discussion as to what constitutes the proper order and way to fulfill this Mitzvah, nonetheless, one shouldn't lose sight of the forest for the trees; the most essential point is that one should actually make the effort to do it. Who would willingly want to turn down a promise by the Gemara for an extremely long life?!

[1] Brachos 8a - 8b, in the statement by Rav Huna ben Rabbi Yehuda in the name of Rabbi Ami.

[2] The Sha'arim Metzuyanim B'Halacha (vol. 2, 72, 25), citing Sefer HaPardes L'Rashi (99) and Rav Yosef Engel's Gilyonei HaShas (Brachos 8a), explains that the reason the Gemara adds to complete shnayim mikra 'im haTzibbur', is that the minhag in the times of the Rishonim, and possibly dating back to the Amoraim, was that after davening, the entire congregation would stay in shul and recite shnayim mikra v'echad targum.

[3] Interestingly, and although it is not the actual halacha [see Shulchan Aruch and Rema (Orach Chaim 285, 7) who conclude that even so there are those who are noheg to do so; citing the Mordechai on Brachos (Halachos Ketanos 968), and Terumas HaDeshen (vol. 1, 23 and vol. 2, 170), Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 13), Taamei HaMinhagim (pg. 180, 346), Shu"t Igros Moshe (Orach Chaim vol. 3, 40), and Orchos Rabbeinu (new print vol. 1, pg. 233 - 234, 35 and 38; citing the Chazon Ish who did not read the haftara shnayim mikra, and the Steipler Gaon who did)], nonetheless, there are decisors who extend the obligation of shnayim mikra to include the weekly haftarah [see Magen Avraham (ad loc. 12; citing the Knesses HaGedolah), Shlah (Maseches Shabbos, Perek Torah Ohr, 22; cited in Pischei Teshuva ad loc. 9), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11), and Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parashas Lech Lecha 11)] and the special maftir of the Shabbos, for example the Arbah Parshiyos - Shekalim,Zachor,Parah,andHachodesh [Magen Avraham (ibid.), Ben Ish Chai (ibid.); see also Shu"t Divrei Moshe (Orach Chaim 12), quoting several earlier authorities; this was known to be the Terumas Hadeshen's personal minhag as well - see Yalkut Yosef (Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 685, par. Parashas Hachodesh 9).]. However, [as per Magen Avraham ibid. and Mishnah Berurah ad loc. 19] as the reason for reciting the haftarah shnayim mikra is so each individual should be at least somewhat familiar with that week's haftarah in case he gets called up to read it, it seems that if the shul has an appointed Baal Koreh to read the haftarah, then it is not necessary for each individual to perform shnayim mikra on the haftarah. On the other hand, as mentioned before, the Steipler Gaon was makpid to do so, even though in his shul (the famous Lederman Shul in Bnei Brak) there was a set Baal Koreh who read the haftarah from a Navi (klaf).

[4] Rambam (Hilchos Tefilla Ch. 13, 25), Tur & Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 1). The Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc. 2) posits that this is a takkanah from Moshe Rabbeinu. See Shu"t Maharsham (vol.1, 213 s.v. ulam) who states that although it is not technically a "chiyuv gamur" like reading the Torah, it has since been equated to the status of "chiyuv". The Maharal M'Prague (Nesivos Olam, Nesiv HaAvodah Ch. 13; see also Pri Megadim, Orach Chaim 285, Mishbetzos Zahav 2, citing the Matteh Moshe), expounding the significance of shnayim mikra, explains that it is meant as a weekly commemoration of the giving of the Torah, which was first given over to Klal Yisrael at Har Sinai, repeated over at the Ohel Moed, and a third time at Arvos Moav. At Arvos Moav the Torah was explained in 70 languages to ensure that each person understood the Torah in his own language. At the time, the language most of Klal Yisrael spoke then was Targum.Therefore, the enactment of shnayim mikra v'echad targum, as the targum is meant to serve as a 'Biur HaTorah'.

[5] Ba'al HaTurim in his commentary to Shemos (Ch. 1, 1). Interestingly, this comment is only found in certain versions of the Baal HaTurim's commentary, such as those printed in most five-volume Mikraos Gedolos Chumashim (including Hamo'or, Oz VeHadar etc.), as they use the full text of the Baal HaTurim's 'Pirush Al HaTorah' (also known as 'Baal HaTurim Hashalem'), first published in 5566, as opposed to his more commonly used but much shorter and less comprehensive 'Pirush HaTorah' which was published much earlier, in 5274. [See the introduction to the recent Oz VeHadar Mikraos Gedolos Chumash, par. Baal HaTurim. Thanks are due to Stephen Posen for pointing this out.] The Levush (Orach Chaim 285, 1) and Pri Megadim (ad loc Mishbetzos Zahav 1) write similarly (with slight variations) that this passage alludes to this Mitzvah, "V'chayev Adam likros (or lehashleem)haparasha shnayim mikra v'echad targum", and conclude "v'zeh chayavim kol Bnei Yisrael". See also the Chida's Chomas Anoch (beginning of Parashas Shemos, brought in Toras HaChida to Parashas Shemos, 8) who credits this allusion to Rabbeinu Efraim, and gives a Kabbalistic explanation to its meaning, and its relevance to Parashas Shemos. [Thanks are due to Rabbi Yitzchak Botton for pointing out this invaluable source.] It is also cited by Rav Chaim Palaji in his Kaf Hachaim (27). See also Rabbi Elchanan Shoff's recent sefer Birchasa V'Shirasa (on Maseches Brachos pg. 73, s.v. shnayim) who cites a variation of this statement found in Midrash Rebbi David HaNaggid (a grandson of the Rambam).

[6] See Kaf Hachaim (Orach Chaim 285, 32), who cites many other rewards for those who perform shnayim mikra v'echad targum faithfully.

[7] See commentaries of Rashi, Tosafos, Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah, and the Rosh on this Gemara, as well as the Beis Yosef (Orach Chaim 285, 2). See also Magen Avraham (ad loc. 2) and Taz (ad loc. 1).

[8] Tur, Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch, Taz (Orach Chaim 285, 2), Shlah (Maseches Shabbos, Ner Mitzva 15); see also the Chafetz Chaim's Likutei Ma'amrim (Ch. 5). The Chasam Sofer (Shu"t vol. 6, 61) also stressed the importance of additionally learning the parasha with the Ramban's commentary

[9] Gemara Megillah 3a. See there further on the importance of Targum Onkelus and Targum Yonason. Tosafos (Brachos 8a-b s.v. shnayim and v'afilu; see also Tamidei Rabbeinu Yonah ad loc. and Maharshal) is very makpid that 'targum' is referring to actual Targum and not any other language; citing proof from the Gemara's stating "V'afilu Ataros V'Divon [need shnayim mikra]," even though (according to Tosafos' understanding) these words only have an obscure Targum Yerushalmi translation. However, other commentaries [i.e., Maharsha, Rav Elazar Landau, and Rav Elazar Moshe Halevi Horowitz, et al. ad loc.] do give alternate interpretations to this statement, which accordingly would not prove that this means exclusively Targum. See Rosh (Brachos Ch. 1, 8) and Tur (Orach Chaim 285) and later commentaries, who cite both sides of this debate. The Bach (ad loc.) maintains that this machlokes may actually be based on two different versions of Rashi's commentary. An additional fascinating approach is given by Rabbeinu Bachaye (Mattos Ch. 32:3), who explains that Ataros and Divon were places of Emori Avodah Zarah. As such, one may think that he should not recite Targum on this passuk, as it alludes to Avodah Zarah. Therefore Chazal stressed these words to teach us that even so, one still needs to fulfill his shnayim mikra v'echad targum obligation, even on these type of pesukim.

[10] Beis Yosef (ibid), quoting the SMaG in the name of Rav Nitranoi Gaon. See also Biur HaGr"a (ad loc. 2), Pri Megadim (ad loc. Mishbetzos Zahav 1 s.v. hataam, who explains this based on the words Ba'er Heitiv), and Biur Halacha (ad loc s.v. targum).

[11] Shu"t Rema (126 - 130), based on Tosafos in Bava Kamma (83a s.v. lashon). This is a famous dispute the Rema had with his cousin, Rav Shmuel Yehuda Katzenellenbogen, as to Tosafos's intent with his statement that 'The Torah spoke in Aramaic', as well as other related issues regarding how to classify Aramaic. Accordingly, the Rema preferred Targum to Rashi, since it was given at Har Sinai. This debate and its ramifications are discussed at length in Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein's recent excellent book, "Lashon HaKodesh: History, Holiness, and Hebrew" (Ch. 8, pg. 175 - 186).

[12] See Rabbi Yosef Meir Radner's recent sefer Nachlas Mayim (vol. 3, Al Sugyos HaShas B'Inyanei HaMoadim, Ch. 34) at length.

[13] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 2), as does the Tur (ad loc.). Explained at length in Biur Halacha (ad loc. s.v. targum).

[14] Regarding whether one can fulfill his Targum obligation with Targum Yonason, Rav Asher Weiss (Shu"t Minchas Asher vol. 1, 13, 4) maintains that indeed one does (even though it is probable that Targum Yonason al haTorah is not really the one referred to in the Gemara - see the Chida's Sheim Gedolim, Maareches HaSeforim 96), as it would be considered similar to reading Rashi's pshat, as it explains the pesukim as well as adds chiddushim. Nevertheless, he concludes that is still preferable to stick to Targum Onkelus, as Chazal intended. However, others, including Rav Chaim Kanievsky, are quoted (see Rabbi Yaakov Skoczylas's recent Kuntress Ohel Yaakov on Shnayim Mikra pg. 17 - 18, footnote 36) as holding that one is not yotzei shnayim mikra with Targum Yonason.

[15] Taz (Orach Chaim 285, 2), Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11), Mishnah Berurah (285, 5). Rav Moshe Feinstein's opinion is cited in sefer Yagel Yaakov (Dardak; pg. 208, quoting his son Rav Dovid Feinstein); Rav Moshe Sternbuch's is found in Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos (vol. 1, 261, s.v. v'hiskamti). Interestingly, the Beis Lechem Yehuda on Hilchos Aveilus (Yoreh Deah 400, 1) writes that although an avel is allowed to perform his chiyuv of shnayim mikra v'echad targum on Shabbos itself [as per Rashal (Hagahos on the Tur ad loc.), as cited in the Derishah (ad loc. 1), Shach (ad loc. 4), and Ba'er Heitiv (ad loc. 3)], nevertheless, in his opinion, this is only referring to reading either Targum or a translation that aids understanding basic pshat, such as the Tzennah U'Renna. Yet, he posits, it would be assur for an avel to fulfill his obligation (that Shabbos) with learning Rashi's commentary, as since it includes drush, would also constitute Talmud Torah, which is prohibited for a mourner. Thanks are due to R' Dovid Shapiro for pointing out this invaluable source.

[16] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 3 and 4), based on Tosafos and the Rosh (ibid).

[17] Although the Rema in Darchei Moshe (ibid, based on the Kol Bo 37) mentions that this truly means Sunday [see also Pri Megadim (ad loc Eshel Avraham 5)], nevertheless, the Mishnah Berurah (ad loc 7, and Shaar Hatziyun 12) and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc 24), citing many Rishonim, rule that this really means the preceding Shabbos after Mincha, when the next week's parasha is already read. However, the Shulchan Aruch HaRav (Orach Chaim 285, 5) and Kitzur Shulchan Aruch (72, 11) rule that optimally one should wait until Sunday to start the next week's shnayim mikra. Additionally, the Birur Halacha (Orach Chaim 285, 25) cites many other Rishonim who hold that one may not start until Sunday. See also Shu"t Minchas Chein (vol. 2, Orach Chaim 17), who concludes that lechatchila one should wait until Sunday to start shnayim mikra, however, b'dieved if one already started on Shabbos after Mincha, he would certainly be yotzei. On the other hand, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer zt"l (Halichos Even Yisrael, Shabbos vol. 1, pg. 13, 1) maintains that one may lechatchila start the next week's Shnayim Mikra after Mincha Gedolah on Shabbos, regardless of whether or not he davened Mincha and actually heard the next week's kriyah.

[18] Indeed, Tosafos (Brachos 8b s.v. yashleem) and the Rosh (ad loc. 8) quote a Midrash (Mechilta, Parashas Bo; Chupas Eliyahu Rabba, Shaar 6), that on his deathbed Rabbeinu Hakadosh (Rebbi) commanded his children "not to eat bread on Shabbos until they finish the whole parasha." Tosafos concludes that this is a Mitzvah Min Hamuvchar, and one still fulfills his obligation if he completes the parasha after he eats on Shabbos. See also Ohr Zarua (vol. 1, Hilchos Krias Shema 12) and Biur Halacha (Orach Chaim 285 s.v. yashlim). Most authorities understand this to mean the Shabbos Lunch meal (Chayei Adam, vol. 2, 7, 9; Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Orach Chaim 285, 5; Aruch Hashulchan ad loc. 8; Mishnah Berurah, ad loc. 9 and Biur Halacha s.v. yashlim); however the Chazon Ish (cited in Orchos Rabbeinu vol. 3, pg. 234; new print vol. 1, pg. 234, 39) held that this was referring to Seudas Shlishis.

[19] Mishnah Berurah (285, 9). This is because one may not fast on Shabbos past Chatzos (see Orach Chaim 288, 1). On the other hand, he cites the Ohr Zarua (vol. 2, Shabbos 42) and Talmidei Rabbeinu Yonah (Brachos 4b in the Rif's pagination s.v. l'olam) as maintaining that optimally, if one did not complete shnayim mikra before going to sleep on Friday night, it would behoove him to wake up early and recite it before davening.

[20] Shaar Hatziyun (ad loc. 14).

[21] See Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 285, 5 and 6; quoting the Shlah), Shaarei Teshuva (ad loc. 1; quoting the Arizal and Rav Chaim Vital), Maggid Meisharim (Mishlei Ch. 23, 6, end s.v. achar kach), Machzik Bracha (ad loc. Kuntress Acharon 2), Ben Ish Chai (Year 2, Parashas Lech Lecha 11), Mishnah Berurah (ibid. 8 and 9 and Biur Halacha s.v. kodem), and Kaf Hachaim (ad loc. 24; citing "minhag Chassidim V'Anshei Maaseh" to recite shnayim mikra on Friday, right after Shacharis, while still wearing their Tallis and Tefillin.

[22] Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285, 4). Interestingly, the Abudraham (Hilchos Hoshana Rabba s.v. b'leil; cited by the Rema in his Darchei Moshe ad loc. 3) writes that it is commendable to finish one's shnayim mikra for the year during the Aseres Yemei Teshuva, in order to be an additional zechus before Yom Kippur. He cites and explains the Gemara's story (Brachos 8b) regarding Rav Bibi bar Abaye of wanting to finish all of shnayim mikra on Erev Yom Kippur, as meaning accomplishing this – making sure to finish the year's shnayim mikra obligation prior to Yom Kippur.

[23] Including Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Tefilla Ch. 12, 35) and Rav Chaim Kanievsky (cited in Halichos Chaim vol. 1, pg. 95, 278).

[24] Including the Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasa (vol. 2, 42, footnote 218) and possibly Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv (see Shgiyos Mi Yavin vol. 2, 40, footnote 9; although some report his opinion as Mincha Ketana). This is also the mashma'os of the Mishnah Berurah (ibid. 10).

[25] This is the opinion of Rav Chaim Na'eh (Ketzos Hashulchan 72, Badei Hashulchan 7).

[26] Halichos Even Yisrael (Shabbos vol. 1, pg. 13, 2).

[27] See Gemara Brachos (26) and Pesachim (58) and Tur, Beis Yosef, Shulchan Aruch, and Mishnah Berurah (Orach Chaim 233, 1).

[28] See Mv"R Rav Yosef Yitzchak Lerner's award-winning sefer Shgiyos Mi Yavin (vol. 2, 40, 2& 3).

[29] See the major commentaries to the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285), including the Shulchan Aruch HaRav, Aruch Hashulchan, Mishnah Berurah (who concludes that 'd'avid k'mar avid u'd'avid k'mar avid') and Kaf Hachaim(3, 6, and 15), as well as Emes L'Yaakov on Tur and Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 285), and his introduction to Emes L'Yaakov al HaTorah.See also Shu"t Tzitz Eliezer (vol. 16, 18), Shu"t Ba'er Moshe (vol. 8, 3), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 5, 216), Shu"t Shevet Halevi (vol. 7, 33, 1), Chut Shani (Shabbos vol. 4, pg. 115, 2), Orchos Rabbeinu (vol. 1, pg. 123; new print vol. 1, pg. 233 - 234, 35 - 37), andHalichos Even Yisrael (Shabbos vol. 1, pg. 14, 4). Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach is quoted (Maadanei Shlomo on Dalet Chelkei Shulchan Aruch, pg. 78:14) as maintaining that although Rav Chaim Na'eh (Ketzos Hashulchan 72, Badei Hashulchan 1) seems unsure of this, nevertheless, practically, the order one fulfills his shnayim mikra obligation is irrelevant, as it cannot be any more stringent than Birchos Krias Shma, where "ain sidran me'akev" (see Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 60, 3).

[30] Mishnah Berurah (ad loc 8), citing Maaseh Rav (59). Although the Aruch Hashulchan (ad loc 4) writes that there is no reason to separate shnayim mikra by aliyos, nonetheless, see Derech Sicha (from Rav Chaim Kanievsky, page 2) who commends this mehalech. It is well known that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv zt"l would use this method of performing shnayim mikra, daily prior to the 6:30 A.M. Shacharis in his shul (see Gadol HaDor [Hebrew] pg. 48).

[31] Rav Moshe Feinstein (Shu"t Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim 5, 17), Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo on Tefillah Ch. 12, 36 7 footnote 106), Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu"t Shevet HaLevi vol. 8, 46) and Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos vol. 1, 261). See also Shu"t Kinyan Torah B'Halacha (vol. 6, 22). Rav Ovadia Yosef zt"l, aside for what he wrote in Shu"t Yechaveh Daas (vol. 2, 37), dedicated his broadcasted weekly shiur several years ago to exhort the masses to perform this weekly Mitzvah. See also Rav Chaim Palaji's Kaf Hachaim (27, 3) and Shmiras Shabbos K'Hilchasah (Ch. 42, 57).

In fact, around a century ago, the Minchas Elazar (Shu"t vol. 1, 26, in the footnote), in a quite telling comment addressing the Rema's statement (Yoreh Deah 361, 1) that generally speaking everyone nowadays is in the category of someone who 'reads and learns (Torah)', remarked that in his day this was certainly true; as 'who doesn't sit in shul over Shabbos and recite shnayim mikra v'echad targum?!"

[32] Including Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner (Shu"t Shevet HaLevi ibid, s.v. pshita), Rav Moshe Sternbuch (Shu"t Teshuvos V'Hanhagos ibid, s.v. ulinyan), and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Halichos Shlomo, Tefilla Ch. 12, 36).Conversely, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer (Halichos Even Yisrael ibid. pg. 15, 6) maintains that there is no outright Chinuch obligation regarding Shnayim Mikra, yet, nevertheless stresses its importance, concluding 'tov lechancham k'dei sheyisraglu b'davar'. Rav Ovadia Yosef (Shu"t Yechaveh Daas ibid, s.v. u'v'siyum) exhorts schools to teach children the Taamei HaMikra (trop); that way when they do the Mitzvah of shnayim mikra they will be able to fulfill it in the optimal manner. Chinuch for shnayim mikra would not include a daughter, as a woman is technically exempt from the Mitzvah of Torah study, and therefore also from this Mitzvah [see Shu"t Ba'er Sarim (vol. 7, 52, 10), Shu"t Mishnah Halachos (vol. 6, 60), Shu"t Rivevos Efraim (vol. 6, 115, 35), Shu"t Mishnas Yosef (vol. 6, 15), Chut Shani on Hilchos Shabbos (vol. 4, pg. 215), Shmiras Shabbos K'hilchasah (Ch. 42, 60), and Yalkut Yosef (Otzar Dinim L'Isha U'lvas Ch. 5, 3)]. On the topic of women being exempt from targum in general, see Aruch Hashulchan (Orach Chaim 282, 11). However, since shnayim mikra is part of the Mitzvah of Torah study, Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (Emes L'Yaakov on Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 285, footnote 308) ruled that a boy who becomes Bar Mitzvah in the middle of the year does not have to repeat the Parshiyos that he read shnayim mikra as a kattan, as even a kattan still has a Mitzvah of Talmud Torah (as explained in his Emes L'Yaakov on Kiddushin 29b - 30a).

Disclaimer: This is not a comprehensive guide, rather a brief summary to raise awareness of the issues. In any real case one should ask a competent Halachic authority.

L'iluy Nishmas the Rosh HaYeshiva - Rav Chonoh Menachem Mendel ben R' Yechezkel Shraga, Rav Yaakov Yeshaya ben R' Boruch Yehuda

This article was written L'lluy Nishmas R' Yaakov Eliezer ben Avrohom Yitzchok, Malka Rivka bas Yaakov, Moshe ben Yaakov Tzvi, R' Chaim Baruch Yehuda ben Dovid Tzvi, L'Refuah Sheleimah for Boruch Leib ben Basya Chaya and Rochel Miriam bas Dreiza Liba, and l'zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v'chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u'miyad!

For any questions, comments or for the full Mareh Mekomos / sources, please email the author: yspitz@ohr.edu.

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SEFER SHMOT - Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

A TABLE OF CONTENTS

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

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

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

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

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

RAMBAN'S APPROACH - GALUT & GEULAH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM BREISHIT TO SHMOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b'hatzlacha!
menachem

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INTRO PART II /

For Parshat Shmot

USING OUTLINES

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

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

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

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

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

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

BUILDING UP TO THE BURNING BUSH

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

Let's explain how and why:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I. INTRODUCTION

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

II. THE MISSION

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

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

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

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

Let's explain:

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

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

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

GOD'S MESSAGE AT THE SNEH

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

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

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

Till then,

shabbat shalom,
menachem

PARSHAT SHMOT Let My People Go

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

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

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

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

PART ONE

FREEDOM OF RELIGION or FREEDOM FROM SLAVERY

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

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

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

MOSHE'S REQUEST FROM PHARAOH

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NEGOTIATIONS & MORE NEGOTIATIONS

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

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

ROUND ONE:

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

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

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

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

ROUND TWO:

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

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

ROUND THREE:

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

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

EVEN AFTER THE TENTH PLAGUE!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE LAST 'TRICK'

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Surely, this interpretation raises many questions.

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

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

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

LET MY PEOPLE GO - PART TWO

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

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

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

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RASHI - 'FOR WHAT PURPOSE'!

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

RASHBAM - 'HOW TO GET THE JOB DONE'!

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

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

THE FIRST HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

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

THE SECOND HALF OF EACH SENTENCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

'NOT SO FAST ...'

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

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

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

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

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

NO OTHER ALTERNATIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

KEEPING A SECRET

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

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

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

THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

TWO PERSPECTIVES

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

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

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

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

FROM MAKKOT TO DIBROT

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

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

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

shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Here is a brief survey of some other explanations offered:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Parshat Shemot: Slavery's Racist Roots

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

PREPARATION FOR PARASHAT SHEMOT:

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

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

3. MOSHE:

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

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

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

PARASHAT SHEMOT:

AND THEY ALL DIED:

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

SHEMOT 1:1-7 --

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

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

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

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

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

A BREWING CRISIS:

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

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

OMINOUS SIGNS:

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHO'S AT THE HELM?

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

EGYPTIAN FEARS:

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

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

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

ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY?

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

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

AN INFERIOR PEOPLE:

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

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

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

DEHUMANIZATION: INSECTS AND VERMIN

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

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

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

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

POPULATION CONTROL BEGINS:

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

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

JUST LIKE ANIMALS:

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

SHEMOT 1:19 --

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

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

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

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

A NATION OF KILLERS:

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

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

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

"RIGHTEOUS GENTILES":

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

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

A LEADER APPEARS:

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

Shabbat Shalom

Parshas Shemos: The Selection of Mosheh

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. WHY MOSHEH?

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

WHY THE REPETITION?

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

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

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

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

WHY DIPLOMACY?

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

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE EXODUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

III. "THESE ARE THE NAMES"

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

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

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

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

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

IV. "VAYISH'R'TZU"

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

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

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

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

V. "LET US DEAL WISELY"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VI. "Hashem IS JUST AND I AM WICKED"

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

A lack of dignity

A self-induced subjugation to Pharaoh and Egyptian culture

Continued tribalism

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

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

VII. ENTER MOSHEH

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIII. THE UNDERCURRENT OF B'RESHEET: FRACTURED BROTHERHOOD

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

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

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

We then meet Esav and Ya'akov (Chapters 25-35). Even though Esav threatens to kill Ya'akov (which fits with Esav's impetuous nature), they are eventually reconciled - after which they go their separate ways.

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

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

IX. MOSHEH, AHARON AND MIRIAM - WORKING TOGETHER

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

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

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

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