

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week we will begin to read the book of Shmot in the synagogue on Shabat. The book begins with a recording of the names of the tribes of Israel that now came to live in Egypt. What is the reason that the Torah bothers again to repeat the names of the children of Yakov? After all, we all aware of their names from the previous prashiyot of the Torah that we read at the conclusion of the book of Bereshith. Apparently, the Torah wishes to stress to us the importance of names in Jewish life and tradition. In fact, we will find throughout the balance of the Torah readings of the year, the names of the tribes of Israel repeated many times. So, what is in a name?

Irving Bunim, of blessed memory, would tell a story about a brit milah that he attended. When the rabbi asked the father for the name of the boy, the father responded: "Avraham, Yitzchok, Yakov, David, Shlomo, Yosef." The rabbi was astounded and asked the father: "why such a string of names?" The father replied: "Rabbi, I am a poor man so the child won't have much of an inheritance. If he looks like my side of the family, he is not going to be too handsome. If he resembles my wife's side of the family he probably won't be that smart either. So, I decided, let him at least have a good name!" The tribes of Israel had good names, each one representing loyalty to God and to Jewish greatness. In the long night of Egyptian exile it would be the fact that they remembered their names – their ancestors, their traditions, their vision of the future – that kept alive their spark of hope for redemption. As long as they remembered their names they were part of the Jewish people and bound to the eternal covenant of being God's people.

There is a Jewish tradition attributed to the kabalistic masters that one should recite a verse containing one's name or the first and last letters of one's name before stepping back at the conclusion of the silent Amidah. This is to allow one to remember

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one's name even in the hereafter - apparently even there, remembering our name is important. For in our name lies our soul and self. That is why Jews always placed great emphasis on naming a child, for in that name there lay the history and past of the family and the hopes and blessings for the newborn's success – Jewish success – in life. I know of nothing that so deeply touches a family's nerve system as the naming of a child. Therefore, before embarking on the narrative of Israel in Egypt, the Torah first gives us an understanding of Jewish survival – through our names. There is truly a great deal in our names. For that will be the key to the eventual redemption and exodus of Israel from Egyptian slavery. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“And a new king arose on Egypt that did not know Joseph.” (Shemos 1:8)

"And a new king arose: Rav and Shmuel argue. One says he was actually a new king while the other says he created new decrees." (Rashi)

"...that did not know Joseph: He made himself as if he didn't know!" (Rashi)

"The person that denies the kindness of his friend will tomorrow deny the kindness of his Maker. So it says by Pharaoh, "that did not know Joseph"...in the end he denied the beneficence of the Holy One Blessed be He, as it says, "And Pharaoh said, 'Who is HASHEM that I should listen to His voice?'" (Mishnas Rebbe Eliezer)

Why and how does it work that way?

In the Siddur HaGra, the Siach Yitzchok asks, why after declaring HASHEM Echod, G-d's Absolute Unity, in the daily Shema, does the verse then demand, "And you should love HASHEM your G-d with all your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your might..." How can the Torah legislate about love? From where does all this fountain of love suddenly spring by simply stating—"HASHEM is One"?

We tend to have affection for those who constitute the constellation of our support system. Our love is distributed to all these facilitators of our good. However when we close our eyes and contemplate the

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notion that all these agencies of our happiness are actually emanating from one sublime source, those feelings are then focused into a rich concentration of love. Then the expression follows more naturally, "And you should love HASHEM your G-d..."

If one recognizes the good done to him by his friend, he can more easily register thanks to HASHEM. This may help explain why the 5th Commandment of honoring parents is on the side of the tablets designated for Mitzvos between man and G-d.

I once heard from Rabbi Avigdor Miller ztl. that if one bentches (says the after blessing for food) and yet fails to express thanks to the chef, waiter, mom, wife, who sweated to meet his needs, then his bentching is, considered according to "mussar" standards worthless. Why? Since we tend to experience life in concrete terms, it is not likely that we can bypass the local tangible actors that serve our immediate needs and then sincerely leap to the loftiest level of abstract thought. The blessing is presumed to be lacking authentic gratitude.

There was a fellow who stepping out onto the golf course removed a brand new Top-Flight ball from a cellophane wrapper and proceeded to hook it deep into the woods. He moved ahead, took out another new ball and sliced it "Kerr-plunk" into the middle of a pond. A third time he unwrapped a brand new golf ball, and in typical fashion whacks it onto a highway where a passing hay truck carries it to destinations unknown. About to take out a fourth new ball in as many swings, the caddie diplomatically interjects, "Why don't you use an old ball?" He wryly replies, "I don't have any old balls!"

Joseph had had not only saved Egypt from famine but he collected the wealth of the world and consolidated Pharaoh's empire. Yet Pharaoh revised the historical record to purge away any appreciation for what Joseph had done. Having burned his bridges with

the past, Pharaoh now needed to invent a new paradigm of reality. Blind to contributions from the more recent past, he is surely in denial of the most "Ancient One" from the deepest past. Such a person has to keep changing the rules, searching desperately for new solutions and allies because he has left himself in the end with no old friends. ©2004 Rabbi L. Lam & www.torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with; each individual and his house came” (Exodus 1:1)

The book of Exodus opens with what is a throwback to that which we already know from the last portions of the book of Genesis: the names of Jacob's children and the seventy Israelite souls—the Jewish households—who came to Egypt. Why the repetition? The great commentator Rashi attempts to explain that "even though Jacob's progeny were counted by name previously, the names are here repeated to show us how beloved they were..." (Rashi ad loc) However, these first few verses of the book of Exodus are actually a prelude to the enslavement in Egypt, the tragedy of this first Jewish exile. I understand a loving recount when times are joyous but I find such mention superfluous when we are facing suffering and tragedy.

Secondly Pharaoh made a striking distinction between males and females when he ordered Jewish destruction: "And Pharaoh commanded his entire nation saying, 'every male baby born must be thrown into the Nile and every female baby shall be allowed to live'" (Exodus 1:22) Pharaoh was apparently afraid to keep the Israelite men alive, lest they wage a rebellion against him; he seems to be fairly certain that the women will marry Egyptian men and assimilate into Egyptian society. However, logic dictates a totally opposite plan. Fathers often love and leave without having had any influence upon their progeny; indeed many individuals don't even know who their biological fathers are! Offspring are far more deeply attached to the mother in whose womb they developed and from whose milk they derive nourishment. Genocide might have been much easier for Pharaoh had he killed off the women and allowed the men to continue to live.

I would argue that although our Bible understands the critical importance of women—we have already seen how Abraham is the first Jew because he is the first individual who is introduced together with his wife who has her own name and identity—Pharaoh is totally oblivious to the pivotal role women play in the development of a nation. The Midrash on the first verse of Exodus (that we thought superfluous) provides an original meaning to the words "individual and his house": "When Israel descended to Egypt, Jacob stood up and said, 'these Egyptians are steeped in debauchery' he rose up and immediately

married all of his sons to women". The Midrash is intensifying an oft quoted statement in the Talmud, "I always call my wife, my house" since the real bulwark of the house is the woman of the house. Since the Jewish nation emerged from a family and family units are the bedrocks of every society, it is clearly the women who are of extreme importance.

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

It goes much further than that. The Midrash identifies the Hebrew midwives as having been Yocheved and Miryam, mother and sister of Moses and Aaron. The Midrash goes on to teach us that their husband and father Amram was the head of the Israelite Court, and when he heard Pharaoh's decree to destroy all male babies, he ruled that Israelite couples refrain from bearing children. After all, why should men impregnate their wives only to have their baby sons killed?! Miriam chided her father: "Pharaoh was better than you are my father, he only made a decree against male babies and you are making a decree against female babies as well". Amram was convinced by his daughters' words— and the result was the birth of Moses, savior of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Perhaps the importance of women protectors of the household and guardians of the future of Israel is hinted at in the "anonymous" verse, "And a man from the house of Levi went and took a daughter of Levi" (Exodus 2:1). Why are the two individuals—Amram and Yocheved—not named? You will remember from the book of Genesis that it was Levi together with his brother Shimon who saved the honor of the family of Jacob by killing off the residents of Shekhem, a gentile people who stood silently by while their leader raped and held captive Dina, daughter of Jacob. When Jacob criticizes them on tactical grounds, they reply, "Can we allow them to make a harlot of our sister?" With these words chapter 34 of the book of Genesis ends; Levi and Shimon have the last word.

Moreover, we know from Jacob and his family that it is the wife who gave names to the children. Even more than Amram and Yocheved, true credit must go to the mother of Amram and the mother of Yocheved. Each of these women gave birth to children in the midst of black bleak days of Jewish oppression. Despite the slavery and carnage round about one mother gives her son the name Amram which means exalted nation; the other mother gives her daughter the name Yocheved which means "glory to God". These two women were

seemingly oblivious to the low estate to which Judaism had fallen in Egypt; their sites were held high, gazing upon the stars of the heavens and covenant between the pieces which guaranteed Israel a glorious future. These two proud grandmothers from the tribe of Levi merited grandchildren like Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Pharaoh begins to learn his lesson when Moses asks for a three day journey in the desert, Pharaoh wants to know who will go. Moses insists, "our youth and our old people will go, our sons and our daughters will go"— our entire households will go, our women as well as our men. (Exodus 10:8) A wiser Pharaoh will only allow the men to leave; he now understands that he has most to fear from the women. And so Judaism establishes Passover, the festival of our freedom, as being celebrated by "a lamb for each house", with the women included in the Pascal sacrificial meal by name no less than the men. And so the women celebrate together with the men—the four cups, the matzoh and the hagaddah—the Passover seder of freedom. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

In the beginning of our Parsha, the Children of Israel are transformed from being royal family to being slave laborers. But how did this transformation take place? How can a people go so quickly from being free, with a status close to nobility, to being forced to work day and night—hard, exhausting work—with no remuneration? Why couldn't they just refuse to continue under such harsh conditions? After all, Paro (Pharaoh) had to devise a plan to make them suffer, so he evidently couldn't just decree that they become slaves. Even afterwards, when the straw was no longer given but the production quotas kept intact, they complained directly to Paro about it (Shemos 5:15-16). If Paro could just decree as he wished, there would be no mechanism to even register such a complaint! So why did the nation take such abuse rather than saying that they no longer wanted to work at all, certainly not as slaves?

Growing up, many of us were taught (based on midrashim) that this transformation occurred gradually. First the people were offered the opportunity to work for the country, for very good pay. Over time, the pay was diminished, until eventually there was no pay—just the work. However, this doesn't address the issue that, if the arrangement was initially mutually agreed upon, why did the Children of Israel maintain their end of the bargain if Paro didn't keep his? Why didn't they just say that they never agreed to work under such conditions?

The Pa'aneach Raza asks the exact opposite question, wondering why Paro had to think up a devious way to get the nation to work. Since he was the king, he could decree anything he wanted—so why even consult with his people before making any decree? He explains that since Yosef had many supporters in the government (including his wife's family), Paro couldn't

just make a harsh decree against Yosef's children (and, by extension, their relatives). He therefore consulted with them, and found a more palatable way to accomplish his goals. Ultimately, the new labor force had no choice, even if it were made to seem as if they did. There may be more to the story, though.

Rashi says that the "sarei misim" (1:11) were "officers that collected the tax from them- and what was the tax? That they should build cities for storage for Paro." Usually, a monetary tax is placed on an entire nation. What kind of tax is it to require (part of) the country to build cities? And how would they (or their supporters in the government) allow a tax that targeted only one segment of the population?

Paro's main goal was to prevent the further population growth of the emerging Israelite nation. It was for this reason that he wanted them to work so hard, so that they would stop raising large families. As their population grew, so did their need for new housing; consequently Goshen (where they lived) became very developed. Even over-developed (see Rabbainu Chananel, quoted by Rabbeinu Bachya on 3:9, that Goshen wasn't big enough anymore, but the Egyptians refused to let them spread out past Goshen). Paro may have positioned it that even though they are more than welcome to stay in Egypt, it is improper for Goshen to be so built up and the rest of Egypt to be barren. Therefore, a "tax" was placed on all new buildings, that for every certain number of buildings built, a building (or buildings) must be built for the Egyptian government. This would provide the dual purpose of exacting manual labor, and creating an incentive program to stop growing; if there was no more growth, there would be no need to build more in Goshen, and no additional "taxes" of having to build more in Egypt.

They may have used the excuse mentioned by the Bechor Shor, that since the rest of Egypt was required by Yosef to give a fifth of their produce to the government, the least the Israelites- who were exempt from this fifth- could do was to build the storehouses to hold this produce.

These arguments may have been accepted by the Israelites and their sympathizers, and so this new, explainable tax was created. It may have even initially included paying for the labor, not just to make it more palatable, but (as the Midrash Hagadol implies) by paying based on the amount of bricks produced, creating a motivation to set a high standard that they would be forced to maintain- even when the pay was reduced or removed. However, after the pay was gone, since the concept of the building tax was already established (and accepted), they couldn't turn around and say that they were not going to build anymore.

When the tax was established, the government provided the straw. When this changed, the "taxpayers" complained, only to be told that this was the way it was going to be. It was then that they realized that they were no longer considered full citizens paying a patriotic tax,

but slave laborers subject to the whims of their Egyptian master. (This may have been the change that, upon coming out of Paro's palace (5:21), they blamed Moshe and Aharon for.) Moshe subsequently asks G-d why He's made things worse, with G-d responding that things will turn around shortly, and he will lead His people out of Egypt. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Just before Moshe (Moses) sees the burning bush (sneh), the Torah tells us that he leads his flock to the farthest end (ahar) of the desert. (Exodus 3:1)

Commentators offer different suggestions as to the meaning of ahar. Saadia Gaon (Babylonia, 10th C.) understands the text as denoting a specific spot-at the end of the desert-where the sneh was located. Hizkuni (R. Chizkia ben Manoach, Northern France, 13th C.) notes that ahar teaches us that Moshe took his flock just beyond the desert, as it was there that he was able to find vegetation for his sheep.

While Saadia Gaon's and Hizkuni's comments teach us that ahar points to a physical place, Seforno (R. Ovadia Seforno, Italy, 16th C.) sees ahar as illustrating why Moshe was suitably prepared for the encounter with God. Moshe, goes far away, for only there could he properly meditate before encountering God.

But, it was left to the master commentary, Rashi (R. Shlomo ben Yitzhak, Northern France, 11th C.), to offer a different approach to the question of ahar. According to Rashi, Moshe took his flock beyond the desert (ahar) to graze. It was there, in no man's land, land owned by no one, that Moshe felt he had the right to graze his flock, knowing that his animals would steal from no one.

Interestingly, the word ahar appears in yet another moment of deep human meeting with God. When the angel of God tells Avraham (Abraham) not to sacrifice Yitzhak (Isaac), Avraham sees a ram caught in the thicket. There too, the Torah states in an unusual way, that the ram was -ahar. (Genesis 22:13) Perhaps the Torah uses the term ahar to again teach that the ram was "beyond" (ahar) in the sense that it belonged to no one. Being ownerless, Avraham felt he could take it and sacrifice it instead of Yitzhak.

An important message emerges from these incidents. One would imagine that in a moment of religious ecstasy, one could use whatever means at his/her disposal to rendezvous with God. After all, shouldn't one be able to expropriate property from anyone if it is needed in the worship of the Lord? The word ahar powerfully rejects this idea. The pathway to reaching out to God involves extreme sensitivity to our fellow person. In a deeply ecstatic spiritual moment, both Moshe and Avraham are careful not to connect with God by taking that which belonged to another.

Seforno's comment is important, as it teaches that encountering God requires spiritual preparation. Rashi's understanding goes further. Ahar teaches that the ultimate preparation in engaging God is how one acts towards another. As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said, on the road to worshipping God, one should be extremely careful not step on others along the way.

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RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrاند

Transcribed by David Twersky

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

Pharaoh's daughter rescued baby Moshe from the Nile River. She brought him home to the palace and raised him as an adopted son. On a superficial level, it is a great story. Pharaoh wants to get rid of all the Jewish baby boys, in order to preclude the possibility of a savior being born to them. He orders all Jewish baby boys thrown into the Nile. In the irony of ironies, Pharaoh's own daughter saves the future savior of Israel from the Nile and brings him into Pharaoh's own palace to raise and nurture him.

Of course, there is more to the sequence of events than just the fact that it "makes a great story." There is a fascinating Ibn Ezra that explains the motivation of hashgacha [Divine Providence] in causing events to turn out this way. The Ibn Ezra speculates that the reason the hashgacha brought Moshe to the palace was to create a future leader of Israel who would be raised in an atmosphere of royalty and power, rather than in an environment of slavery and submission.

In the great controversy of nature versus nurture, the Ibn Ezra lends weight to the point of view that gives great import to nurture in determining what a person eventually becomes. If Moshe Rabbeinu had been raised as a slave, thinking like a slave and acting submissively like a slave, it would have been much more difficult for him to become the leader of two million people.

The Ibn Ezra cites the fact that Moshe killed the Egyptian for an act of injustice that the latter perpetrated. A slave, who is always downtrodden and spat upon, would not have the forcefulness and the gumption to protest injustice and to personally punish the perpetrator. There is no way we could imagine someone with a slave's mentality doing such a thing. On the other hand, someone brought up in the house of the king, believing he is a prince, automatically possesses a certain aura and confidence that allows him to intervene in situations that people with less self-esteem would certainly avoid.

The Ibn Ezra similarly notes Moshe's intervention on behalf of Yisro's daughters during the incident with the Shepherds at the well of Midyan. Moshe was a stranger who had just arrived in town. Who asked him to intervene? Who asked him to get

involved? The answer is that someone who grew up in a house of authority and leadership has the courage and the assertiveness to take charge and administer justice wherever justice needs to be administered. These leadership abilities were much more easily nurtured in the palace of the king than in a house of slaves.

The Mir Masgiach, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, comments on this Ibn Ezra that we learn from here the power of nurture. Two genetically identical twins will grow up to be very different individuals if they are exposed to different educations and different atmospheres in their formative years. This underlies the power of chinuch [education], the power of environment, and the power of a nurturing home.

We look around today and unfortunately see the many ills that plague our society. What is happening to society? Why is this happening? Part of the answer is that there is no real home life for a large number of children growing up in our society. It is not the least bit surprising and it does not require a great social scientist to see the cause and effect relationship between how one is raised and how one turns out.

The reverse is true as well. When one takes an individual and showers him with love and with confidence, giving him a sense of self and a sense of presence, chances are high that the individual will grow up to demonstrate far greater leadership capabilities than an equally talented individual who was not given the benefit of such an enlightened upbringing.

The ironic sequence of events at the beginning of Sefer Shmos provided the leadership training necessary for the savior who would eventually take Israel out of Egypt.

And Yet, One Need Not Be a Prince to Rise to Greatness

The marriage of Amram and Yocheved is described with the enigmatic words "And a man from the House of Levi went and he married the daughter of Levi" [Shmos 2:1]. It would seem appropriate as the Torah introduces this very important milestone in the Biblical narrative—the birth of Moshe Rabbeinu -- that the Torah would at least mention the names of Moshe's parents. Shouldn't we be told explicitly of Moshe's proud "yichus" [ancestry]?

Rav Bergman comments in the Shaarei Orah that this is precisely the point. A person does not need yichus to become Moshe Rabbeinu. Anyone is capable of reaching spiritual heights based on his own merits and his own capabilities. A person does not need to have a distinguished father to lead a distinguished life. It is true that Moshe's father happened to be the Gadol HaDor [greatest man of his generation], but the Torah de-emphasizes that point. Moshe's parents are left anonymous to stress that lineage is not what made Moshe who he was.

The idea is that every child and every human being is capable of reaching great heights despite a humble lineage. The Rambam writes this in Hilchos Teshuvah [5:2]: "Any individual can grow up to be as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu."

In this week's parsha, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky comments that the Ramo'h rules in Shulchan Aruch that it is preferable, if a mother is incapable of nursing her baby, to have another Jewish woman nurse the child. A non-Jewish woman may only serve in this capacity if there is no alternative. The reason for this is because the non-Jewish nurse eats foods that are not kosher, and the milk then is a byproduct of such foods. This law is derived from the fact that Moshe refused to nurse from the non-Jewish women in Pharaoh's palace. The reason, our Sages tell us, that he refused to nurse from foreign women is that "the mouth that would eventually directly speak to the Almighty should not begin life by sucking non-Kosher matter."

The Ramo'h rules in Shulchan Aruch, based on this incident in Chumash and the reasoning of "the mouth that is destined to speak with the Divine Presence," that if at all possible a Jewish baby should not be given to a non-Jewish wet nurse. We might ask when the last time was that a Jewish baby was born who grew up to engage in personal conversation with the Divine Presence. It is certainly not an everyday occurrence. It has not happened since the days of the Malachi, the last of the prophets.

Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky says that we learn from here that every Jewish child has to be looked at as a child that may potentially speak with the Divine Presence. Great lineage is not necessary to achieve great potential. "An anonymous man from the Tribe of Levi went and married an anonymous daughter of Levi." As the Rambam writes, anyone is capable of reaching such a level.

Some might think that the two thoughts presented herein are contradictory. Upon reflection, one should realize that this is not necessarily the case. "These and these are the words of the Living G-d." [Eruvin 13b] © 2004 Rabbi Y. Frand & www.torah.org

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar by quoting the first pasuk of the parsha: "Ve'eila shemos... " ("These are the names of Ya'akov Avinu's sons, who descended to Egypt with him... ")

I have translated the word "shemos" as "names". However, in other contexts the word "sheim" (singular form of shemos) has a slightly different meaning: reputation. The Sfas Emes reaches for a Medrash in Medrash Rabba on Koheles which works with this different meaning of sheim. The Medrash is reacting to the pasuk (7:1) "Tov sheim mishemen tov... " (ArtScroll: "A good name is better than good oil... ")

The Sfas Emes quotes the comment of the Medrash, which tells us that Chananiah, Mishoel and Azariah, who had "only" a good reputation in their favor, did better than Nadav and Avihu, who had been anointed with the sanctifying oil of the Mishkan.

The Sfas Emes explains. Chananiah, Mishoel and Azariah were "self-made men." That is, they reached a high stature in their avoda only through their own effort and striving. And in the merit of that effort, they emerged safe and sound from the fiery furnace into which the wicked king of Babylonia had thrown them (Doniel, Ch.3). By contrast, Nadav and Avihu had been granted high status by HaShem—as symbolized by their being anointed with oil. Notwithstanding this initial advantage, they ended their lives in disgrace—with their neshamos burnt to a crisp—on the day the Mishkan was inaugurated. The contrast between those with the shem tov and those with the shemen tov is clear.

[Question: Does this model apply to contemporary "ba'alei teshuva" and "frum from birth?" Perhaps a third category is needed, reflecting the fact that many people who are "ffb" also try to be "bt"]

The Sfas Emes moves on now to a new line of thought. The reason the shevatim (Ya'akov Avinu's progeny) descended to Egypt was to extend the light of kedusha (sanctity) to the world of hester (HaShem's "hiding" Himself). The Patriarchs had been on an extraordinary spiritual level—"lema'ala min hateva." But apparently their spiritual achievements had an inadequate impact on the world as a whole. Hence, the need for the shevatim to come and make the world aware of HaShem's Presence in ordinary life.

The Sfas Emes immediately draws our attention to a parallel in our own experience. Shabbos is also a context of extraordinary kedusha, but that kedusha is not reserved for Shabbos. On the contrary, the Sfas Emes tells us, what Shabbos is all about—i.e., the "inyan" of Shabbos—is to activate sanctity in our weekday activities as well. Thus, during the week, we are also engaged in Avoda—written with an upper-case letter "A". For the Sfas Emes sees our work as having the potential for being Service of HaShem—to bring the quality of Shabbos into the weekdays...

We move now to the first paragraph of the Sfas Emes for the year 5632. The Sfas Emes quotes the first Rashi on this parsha. Rashi asks: why do the parsha's opening sentences go into the seemingly unnecessary detail of listing the sons of Ya'akov by their individual names. Rashi answers: "Le'hodia chi'basam". That is, the reason for the individualized listing is to tell of Hashem's love for Bnei Yisroel. HaShem treasures each one; and therefore, identifies by his individual name.

The Sfas Emes asks a basic question: "Ul'emi le'hodia?" "To whom does the Torah intend to convey this message of HaShem's love?" The Sfas Emes answers: HaShem had in mind to convey this

information to Bnei Yisroel themselves. Each of us should be aware that he/she has been sent to this world with his own mission. And, just as the stars light up the night, so, too, were we sent to Egypt to find the light that is present even there. We do well to note the Sfats Emes's assumption that there is light to be found even in Egypt, as well as the sense of mission that attaches to all of us. © 2004 Rabbi N.C. Leff and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The Torah portion of Shemot ends on a surprising note: While it is true that the Almighty had warned Moshe when He spoke to him at Sinai that the release from Egypt would not be fast and simple ("I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to leave" [Shemot 3:19]), there was no advance hint that the situation would first become worse before it improved. In fact, the outcome of Moshe's first mission to the nation had implied that there would be a good result ("And the nation believed... And they kneeled and bowed down" [4:31]), but this was then followed by disappointment. Not only did Pharaoh completely reject the request by Moshe and Aharon, he increased the oppression, making it more severe than it had been before. As a result, the leaders of Bnei Yisrael came to Moshe to complain, and Moshe in turn went to the Almighty:

"Why did you make matters worse for this nation? Why did you send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has oppressed the nation more, and you have not rescued your people!" [5:22-23]. Why did this unexpected change in the course of events take place?

Perhaps the reason for the change was related to the difference in principle between the command given to Moshe at the burning bush and the way he carried out the instructions. Moshe was told to turn to Bnei Yisrael with the good news, "I have remembered you and all that was done to you in Egypt" [3:16], and G-d promised Moshe, "They will listen to your voice" [3:18]. However, Moshe feared that Bnei Yisrael "will not believe me and will not listen to my voice" [4:1], and the Almighty therefore gave him three signs, to make sure that they listened, emphasizing that it might not be necessary to use them all. "But if they do not believe you and they do not listen to the first sign, they will believe the next sign. And if they do not believe these two signs... you shall take from the water of the Nile..." [4:8-9]. That is, Moshe was expected to turn to Bnei Yisrael and test their faith. If they did not respond positively, he was instructed to show each sign in sequence and test whether the people had achieved the desired level of faith.

However, when he carried out his mission Moshe acted differently. "And Aharon spoke all of these

things that G-d had told Moshe, and he performed the signs before the nation" [4:30]. Moshe and Aharon did not wait to see the reaction of the people to each sign, but they immediately showed all the miracles. The objective was in fact obtained—"and the nation believed" [4:31] -- but evidently the path taken was too short. Bnei Yisrael should be able to become faithful even if they do not see an entire sequence of miracles. The true test of faith in this case, starting with the redemption from Egypt and leading to all the subsequent generations, is in the darkest moments, believing in G-d even when His ways cannot be seen clearly.

The conclusion is that the very speed with which the initial faith of Bnei Yisrael in the redemption was achieved led to a need to make the conditions harsher than they were at first. In this way the nation would learn that the stages of redemption might entail hardships. This will also be a lesson for Moshe, as is written in the last verse of the Torah portion: "Now you will see what I do to Pharaoh, for he will send them out with a mighty hand, and he will expel them from his land with a strong hand" [6:1]. As Rashi notes, "You wondered about my practices... Therefore, 'now you will see'— you will see what will be done to Pharaoh, but not what will be done to the seven nations of Canaan, when I bring them to the land."

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays the true potential of the Jewish people and their unlimited ability. The prophet Yeshaya opens with a descriptive expression about the Jewish exile and exodus from Egypt. He states, "Those who are coming will strike roots as Yaakov and will blossom and bud as Yisroel." (27:6) These words refer to the drastic contradistinction between the Jewish people who struck roots in Egypt and those who merited the exodus. Yeshaya says that they entered with the identity of Yaakov and left as Yisroel. This change of name typified the spiritual ascent of the Jewish people which began from the downtrodden status of the galus Jew, Yaakov, and resulted with the supreme status of Yisroel. These names truly reflect the incredible spiritual growth of the Jewish people who developed from a nearly assimilated group rising to the lofty kingdom of priests.

In this week's parsha the S'forno reveals to us a significant dimension regarding the Jewish people's conduct in Egypt. In describing the Jewish population explosion in Egypt the Torah says, "And the children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied in swarms and proliferated and became overpowering in excessive measures." (Sh'mos 1:7) The S'forno takes note of this peculiar expression "multiplying in swarms" which seems to compare the Jewish people to swarms of insects and crawling creatures. He explains that this

comparison refers to the prevalent mannerisms of the Jewish people in those days. They fell prey to Egyptian culture and were transformed into of a free thinking, undisciplined race. This comment reflects the words of Chazal which indicate that during the early years in Egypt the Jews roamed the streets of Egypt. They preoccupied themselves with Egyptian practices and freely participated in Egypt's immoral style of amusement and enjoyment.

The S'forno, in his commentary to previous passages, informs us that this severe spiritual descent transpired only after the passing of the initial pious group who entered Egypt. Once the devout were out of sight, the Jewish people began viewing Egypt as their homeland and became acclimated to her alien culture. This, however, was the description of their earliest era. Miraculously, after years of heavy servitude and torturous slavery, this same Jewish people emerged as a nation of sanctity and dignity, each worthy of the highest level of prophecy. At this point they qualified for the revelation of Hashem at Har Sinai and were temporarily elevated to the spiritual level of the angels. The prophet Yeshaya reflects upon this early experience to demonstrate the Jewish people's true potential. From it we learn that even after digressing for an extended period to the level of swarming creatures the Jewish people's potential remained that of the angels themselves.

The prophet Yeshaya continues and predicts that this pattern will reoccur amongst the Jewish nation. He begins with sharp words of reprimand to the ten tribes of Israel and calls upon them to remove every trace of idolatry from their kingdom. He warns them and says, "Woe unto you, crown of arrogance; drunkards of Ephraim. The splendor of your glory will be likened to a withering bud." (28:1) This refers to the imminent experience of destruction and exile soon to befall the ten tribes. Yeshaya then continues and turns to the remaining Jewish segment, the Judean kingdom, and blames them for following a similar path. To them Yeshaya says, "And they too were negligent through wine and strayed through intoxication...for all of their tables were replete with refuse without any remaining space." (27:7,8) These passages refer to the sinful plunge of the Judean empire into idolatry. Although this repulsive practice originated from the ten tribes it eventually took hold amongst the Judean kingdom and they also seriously strayed from the proper path.

But, Yeshaya inserts here some encouraging words and says, "On that day Hashem will be a crown of splendor and a diadem of glory for the remnant of His people." (28:5) The Radak (ad loc.) explains Yeshaya's reason for expressing these comforting words in the midst of his heavy rebuke. Radak sees these words as a reference to the Judean kingdom's future fortune, meriting one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history. In their near future, the mighty King Sanherev would attempt to engage in a heavy war against the Jewish

people. In response to this Hashem would perform an awesome miracle and rescue His people without suffering one casualty. This miracle would result from an unprecedented campaign by King Chizkiyahu to proliferate Torah knowledge throughout the Judean kingdom. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94b) records that during this illustrious era every single person—man or woman, boy or girl—was proficient in the most complicated laws of ritual cleanliness. This very same kingdom who, one generation earlier was so heavily involved in idolatry, would soon cleanse itself from all sin and become totally immersed in Torah study and rituals. Through this enormous comeback, the prophet demonstrated the unlimited potential of the Jewish people. Although they may seriously digress in their spiritual ways, they do remain capable of a perfect reversal. Yeshaya stressed the phenomena that over the span of but one generation the Jewish people went from total spiritual bankruptcy to almost unprecedented perfection, meriting one of the greatest miracles ever seen.

In this spirit, Yeshaya brings the haftorah to a close and relays Hashem's heartwarming statement to our patriarch Yaakov. Hashem says, "Now, don't be embarrassed Yaakov, and don't blush from shame because when your children will see My hand in their midst they will sanctify My name... and exalt the Hashem of Israel." (29: 22, 23) The undertone here is that in the future the Jewish people will severely stray from the proper path. Their actions will be so inexcusable that their beloved patriarch Yaakov will be embarrassed and ashamed of them. But Hashem reminds Yaakov to focus on the unlimited potential of his children, the Jewish people. Although they can and do stray from the path, this is only when Hashem conceals Himself from them. In spiritual darkness, they lose sight of true values and, being amongst the nations of the world, adopt foreign values and customs. But the moment Hashem returns to them with His open hand they will regain their true status of greatness. They will quickly return to Hashem and follow His perfect ways, sanctifying and exalting Him with their every action. Hashem told our patriarch Yaakov to overlook his children's present spiritual level and to focus on their potential greatness. The time will surely arrive when Yaakov, after all the long, hard years of servitude and exile will merit Hashem's revelation. Undoubtedly the response to this will be an immediate return to the lofty levels of spirituality and Yaakov, now Yisroel, will praise and glorify Hashem's name for eternity. © 2004 Rabbi D. Siegel & www.torah.org

