

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Who was the real model for Moses, the great liberator of his people who waged a successful revolution against one of the mightiest autocrats in history, Pharaoh King of Egypt? It may very well have been Amram his father, who according to the Midrash was the head of the Sanhedrin (Jewish Court) and labored mightily to maintain the traditions of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob even among the Hebrew slaves; it may also have been Yocheved his mother, who according to the Midrash was one of the midwives who refused to listen to Pharaoh's orders to murder all of the baby males on their birth-stools; and it may even have been his older sister Miriam, who argued with her father against his original plan to separate Hebrew husbands from their wives so that no Hebrew male babies would be cast into the Nile River; Miriam charged her father with being even stricter than Pharaoh, since the Egyptian despot only prevented the Hebrew males from growing up while the "divorce plan" would prevent Hebrew girls as well as boys from being born. Amram accepted his daughter's argument, and so baby Moses was born!

I believe that Moses' true model was his third parent, his Gentile, Egyptian "mother," who was no less an important factor in his life than were Amram, Yocheved and Miriam. The Bible opens Chapter Two of the Book of Exodus with the very nondescript and laconic record that "a man went from the house of Levi and took a daughter of Levi; the woman conceived and gave birth to a son whom they hid (from the Egyptian authorities) for three months. (The woman) could not hide him any longer, so she took for him a wicker basket, and smeared it with clay and pitch. She placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the River (Nile). His sister stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him" (Exodus 2: 1-4).

Each of these three characteristics are nameless-perhaps because Egyptian law decreed that the baby boy-child was not supposed to have lived, and then neither he nor his parents and sister would even comprise a family unit together. The story continues: "Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the River (Nile), and her maidens walked along the River (to allow her some privacy-Netziv). She saw the basket

among the reeds; she sent forth her maidservant (the one close attendant who was usually constantly at her side) and took the basket. She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold, a youth was weeping. She took pity on him and said, 'this is one of the Hebrew baby boys'" (Exodus 2:5,6).

Apparently, Pharaoh's daughter-identified by the Midrash as Bityah, literally daughter of G-d-suspected what was contained in the wicker-basket, and desired to be alone-without any witnesses-when she opened it. Miriam the guardian seizes the moment to suggest calling a Hebrew wet-nurse for the baby, brings his biological mother Yocheved, whom the Egyptian princess hires immediately. "And the boy grew up, and she (Yocheved) brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh, and he was a son to her. And she called his name Moses (Moshe), as she said, 'For I drew him from the water'" (Exodus 2:10).

Now the Ibn Ezra already asks about the origin of the name Moshe; the Hebrew literally means "I draw forth," the active verb, but in context he should have been named "Mashui," the one who was drawn forth, in the passive voice. The Netziv and Kassuto both make the point that the word Moshe in Egyptian means son, which gives profound meaning to Bitya's declaration: "she called his name Moseh, son, because (she said) 'I drew him forth from the water.'" She is in effect declaring that she has earned the right to consider him her son since she took him from the water (a double entendre, referring both to the waters of the Nile River and-by allegory the water or amniotic fluid which "break" with the birth of a baby) and saved his life from the Egyptian decree.

From this perspective, the Egyptian Princess was a true rebel against the unjust and inhuman laws of Pharaoh's regime, risking her life to save this child of the Hebrews. Bitya was indeed a second mother and a magnificent model of courage, righteousness and faith for a man whose name would prove prophetic: he, too, would "draw forth" the Hebrew slaves from the waters of the Reed Sea, bringing them from death to life, from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light. Moshe would be the model for the eventual Moshia, or savior, who will ultimately bring all the nations of the world to peace, freedom and redemption. It is only fitting that our great liberator who gave the message of freedom to Jew and Gentile alike should have a mother born of

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Hebrews and a second mother born of Pharaoh. © 2006
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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd Moshe was shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law Yisro, the (religious) leader of Midyan" (Shemos 3:1). We had already been told that Moshe married one of the daughters of the "leader of Midyan" (see 2:16/21), so including Yisro's title here seems superfluous. All the Torah needed to say was that Moshe was tending to his father-in-law's sheep; why repeat that he was the "leader of Midyan?"

Even though this is the first time that the name "Yisro" is mentioned, so it could be argued that including his title was necessary to make sure that we know this is the same person referred to earlier (as opposed to Reu-el, Yisro's father), telling us that Yisro was Moshe's father-in-law should be enough for us to identify him as the person referred to earlier as the "leader of Midyan." Besides, if there was any doubt who Yisro was, the Torah could have added his name earlier, inserting one "extra" word there rather than two "extra" words here.

In addition to the problem of *why* the Torah inserted Yisro's title again here, there is another problem of *how* the Torah can insert it here. Rashi (2:16) refers to the midrash (Shemos Rabba 2:32) that Yisro had been the religious leader in Midyan, but had rejected his idol worshipping ways. Because of this, the people of Midyan excommunicated him, which is why he couldn't hire any shepherds and had to have his daughters tend his sheep (until Moshe came along). If he was excommunicated, he was obviously no longer their leader in any capacity (religious or otherwise). Referring to him at this point as the "leader of Midyan" seems not only superfluous, but also inappropriate.

Yonasan ben Uziel, in his Targum (translation of the Biblical Hebrew into Aramaic), translates the two uses of the title "leader of Midyan" differently. When we are first introduced to Yisro (2:16) he is described as the "onais" of Midyan, which the Aruch says is actually Greek for "donkey," explaining that Yonasan wanted to use a derogatory term for Yisro when he was still their religious leader (since he was worshipping idols). When Moshe leads Yisro's sheep into the desert, which was

after he no longer worshipped idols, Yonasan describes Yisro as "rabba," the (or at least a) leader of Midyan. Rashi had explained even the first reference as meaning "leader," not "religious leader," perhaps for this very reason; if the second reference was made after Yisro had denounced idol worship, then the term "kohain Midyan" can't mean "religious leader." It must therefore, in both instances, mean "(political) leader." However, we still don't know how Yisro can be called any kind of leader, since the community he is purportedly leading excommunicated him. We also don't know why either the Torah had to repeat his title here, or how the Torah can use the same term to refer to two different things (religious leader and political leader).

When Yisro resigned his position as religious leader, this was taken (rightly so) by the people of Midyan as an affront to their religion. Not just because their religion had been rejected, but because it had been rejected by such a respected member of the community. Just as Moshe "wanted to live with [Yisro]" (2:21) because he appreciated the level of intelligent discussion and thought that Yisro embodied, the people of Midyan had pride in the fact that such a thinker followed their deity (or deities). If there was nothing to this worship, how could this intelligent sage lead it, let alone follow it. When Yisro made his rejection of the religion public, he was excommunicated not only because he was now a heretic, but because his rejection impacted the pride and confidence they had in their form and object of worship. He was no longer their official "leader," but his opinions were still respected, and his ongoing rejection was a continuing sore spot for his former religious community.

When Moshe led his father-in-law's flock to the desert, we are told (see Rashi on 3:1) that he was taking them there to avoid any possibility of grazing on private property, which would have been stealing. This was necessary in its own right, as taking someone else's property is wrong, even if "everyone else does it." But because he was Yisro's son-in-law, and it was Yisro's flock, there was added meaning to Moshe's going out of his way to avoid stealing. Everyone knew that Yisro had rejected their religion. But now they also knew that Yisro's going against the grain was accompanied by honesty and integrity. His new religion respected the property of others, even when it was inconvenient.

Perhaps this is why the Torah added Yisro's (old) title again. Moshe taking the (opinion) leader of Midyan's sheep out of the way to avoid grazing on other's property reflected on Yisro and what he represented. His "leadership" position caused others to notice, creating a kiddush Hashem (sanctification of G-d's name).

This is true of all who represent something. Our actions reflect the way of life we have chosen. And

whether or not it is accurate, our actions reflect back on what we represent. If someone who is known to associate himself with the Jewish religion curses, then it is taken to mean that Judaism is okay with cursing. The same is true with *loshon hara*, etc. If a storeowner encourages cash transactions by not charging sales tax, or a consumer is willing to avoid paying that tax, either one wearing a kippah tells the other that we believe it is okay to cheat. Moshe went out of his way to avoid stealing from others, and the Torah is pointing out that this reflected back on his belief system, and the belief system of his father-in-law. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah in this week's parsha informs us that there "arose a new king - a Pharaoh that knew not of Yosef." The Talmud advances two opinions as to who this new king was. One opinion is that he was truly a new king, who out of ignorance and prejudice knew not of Yosef and how he saved Egypt in its darkest days of famine and depression. The other opinion advanced there in the Talmud is that it was the same old Pharaoh that had been blessed by Yaakov and saved by Yosef but that now he chose not to remember Yosef and his past grand achievements. Rashi here in this parsha quotes both opinions of the Talmud. This second opinion implies somehow that this Pharaoh must have lived a very long life since the enslavement of the Jews by the Egyptians did not begin until well over a century after the death of Yosef and his brothers. It is therefore reasonable to see in these seemingly contradictory opinions of the Talmud a lesson and perspective on Jewish history and current events. The two opinions are in reality but two sides of the same coin - the coin of ingratitude, hatred of the "other" and selective historical memory. The new Pharaoh and the old Pharaoh are really the same type of historical tyrant and hater. And they are both to be considered very dangerous to Jewish survival and to civilization generally. And in every generation they arise once again to threaten us and all of humanity.

There are those who are truly ignorant of the contributions of the Jewish people to the general welfare of humanity and civilization. Inundated with false indoctrinations and malicious conspiracy theories, overwhelmed by religious or secular fanaticism, seeking instant utopia whose pursuit justifies the most murderous means imaginable, this new king knows not Yosef and also sees the Jews as a mortal threat. The new king in the past century was mainly represented by the Communist movement, by the Soviet Union. The poison of anti-Semitism which the Soviet Union disseminated throughout the world has survived the fall of that evil empire itself. It haunts us to this very day. But there was also the old king who knew not Yosef. Jewish contributions to the development of

Wilhelminian Germany and to the Weimar republic were purposely forgotten by the German people in World War II. The twelve thousand Jews who died in World War I fighting for German victory were willfully expunged from the German mindset. The old king was ungrateful and immoral. The contributions of the Jews to Moslem society have been great and long-lasting. Yet, the old kings and the new kings that govern much of that society today choose to forget and not know and now demand the extinction of the Jewish state and people. The narrative of Shemot repeats itself today in Europe and Africa and here in the Middle East. The world needs a good lesson of teaching in the parsha of Shemot. So too do the Jewish people. It will make us wiser and more realistic about our present and future course as a people and as a country. © 2006 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 AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why, out of all places, did God reveal himself to Moshe (Moses) through the burning bush? sneh (Exodus 3:2)?

One possibility is that the experience seems to be a microcosm of God's ultimate revelation to the entire Jewish people. Note the similarity in sound between sneh and Sinai, the mountain where God speaks to the Jewish people. Indeed, the revelation at the sneh and Sinai occurred in the same place-the desert of Horev. Both unfolded through the medium of fire. At the sneh, it was a fire that was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2) At Sinai, it was a smoke that engulfed the entire mountain. (Exodus 19:18)

There are other approaches that understand the sneh as symbolic either of Egypt or the Jewish people. On the one hand it was akin to Egypt. Just as it is difficult to remove the hand from a thorn bush without lacerating the skin, so was it impossible to escape the "thorn bush" known as Egypt without some amount of pain and suffering. (Mekhilta, beginning of Shemot)

On the other hand, the sneh can be viewed as representative of the Jewish people. In Egypt, the Jews were stripped of all goods, feeling lowly, so low it was as if they were driven into the ground. The sneh is also simple without any fine branches or leaves and is so close to the ground.

But the meaning of sneh that resonates most powerfully sees the sneh as symbolic, not of Sinai or of Egypt or of Israel, but of God. As long as Jews were enslaved, God could only reveal Himself in the lowly burning bush in the spirit of "I am with my people in their pain." God cannot be in comfort as long as His people are in distress. (Rashi quoting Tanhuma 14)

And we, created in God's image, must emulate His ways. At times of suffering for our people, we must empathize with them. Empathy differs from sympathy. In sympathy I remain who I am and you remain who you are. The one feels for the other. Empathy means a merger of the two into one. Your pain is my pain, your suffering is my suffering and your joy is my joy.

As we frequently hear of murders in Israel, we dare not become desensitized to the horror which unfolds. For many it is business as usual. The sneh teaches it shouldn't be this way. If God feels our anguish, so too should we feel the anguish of others. Only when feeling the pain will we, as God did here in the Book of Exodus, be impelled to act and do our share to bring relief and redemption to the suffering of our people. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

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 Efraim. 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. © 2006 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

There are many parallel elements between the story of Moshe's rescue from the decrees of Pharaoh (Shemot 2:1-10) and the time when Yishmael was saved from death (Bereishit 21:14-21). In both cases a boy-young man is in mortal danger, caught in the bushes and left to G-d's mercy. (With respect to Yishmael: "She threw away the youth" [Bereishit 21:15]; "And G-d heard the voice of the youth" [21:17]. With respect to Moshe: "And she opened it and saw the child, and behold, a youth was crying" [Shemot 2:6].) In

both cases, the child is accompanied by a woman from his family, who takes a position far away and cannot give direct help. (Hagar: "And she went and sat opposite, as far as the range of a bow" [Bereishit 21:16]; Miriam: "And his sister stood far away" [Shemot 2:4].) In each case, the child is eventually rescued, and the Torah then tells how he continued his life. About Yishmael, we are told, "And G-d was with the youth and he grew and settled in the desert... And his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt" [Bereishit 21:20-21]. About Moshe, it is written, "And Moshe grew up... And Moshe fled from Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midyan" [Shemot 2:11,15]. In Moshe's case too the story ends with his marrying a woman from a foreign land. The element of similarity is enhanced by the Midrash, which identifies Hagar as the daughter of Pharaoh (Bereishit Rabba 45:1).

On the other hand, keeping these similarities in mind, the differences between the two stories are even more remarkable. Hagar reacts to what happens to her with complete despair. She throws her son away under a nearby bush, moves away as far as an arrow can be shot in order not to see her son die, and raises her voice to weep. Moshe's family reacts in a completely different way. From the very beginning, his family's courage can be clearly seen, when they encourage family life in spite of Pharaoh's evil decree. They refuse to accept the decree, and they send their daughter to watch over Moshe when he is put into a basket. Not like Hagar at all, Miriam does not throw the child away (which would correspond to Pharaoh's decree, "Every son that is born shall be thrown into the Nile" [Shemot 1:22]) but rather places the basket in the reeds. Her objective is not to avoid seeing him but just the opposite-

"to know what would happen to him" [2:4]. In Moshe's story there is also the sound of crying, but it is Moshe's voice, while Miriam and Yocheved do not burst out crying in desperation but make an effort to save Moshe. Therefore, the two children are rescued in different ways. Yishmael is saved by a miracle which changes the course of nature, while Moshe is saved as a result of a human initiative, without open intervention by the Almighty.

This contrast puts the messages of the stories into sharp focus. It is no accident that the Torah describes the circumstances of Moshe's birth. The story makes it clear that Moshe's personality stemmed from his parents' home, and that his skill of leading the nation in spite of many difficulties was something that came to him with his mother's milk. The members of Moshe's family demonstrated the characteristics of courage and initiative at a difficult and threatening time for Yisrael, and they refused to despair. In contrast with the pale image of Hagar, we see Moshe's family as a home where the leadership of Bnei Yisrael can be nurtured and grown.

"And They Kept the Children Alive"

by Rabbi Udi Ratt, Puah Institute

Shemot is the book of redemption, where we move from the stories of our forefathers, a sign and a symbol for their descendents, to the process of the formation of the nation of Yisrael.

The formation of the nation is a process that includes difficulties and times of crisis, birth pangs, and the pain of redemption. The nation moves from the distress of Egypt to the expanse of the desert, from enslavement in Egypt to the events of receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai.

The end of the process is hinted at by many elements at the very beginning of the events. Moshe's name means to pull or draw, and he indeed draws the nation out of Egypt. His name was given to him when he was taken out of the water, after Pharaoh decreed, "Every son that is born shall be thrown into the Nile" [Shemot 1:22]. It is no accident that his rescue and his name can both be traced to the home of the ruler of Egypt.

A Jewish child, one who is born to a Jewish woman, enters the nation of Yisrael as a result of the innate traits that have been passed down to him from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaacov. His Judaism is passed on to him and it passes on through him by virtue of the innate traits that were given to our forefathers, as is explained in the Kuzari. When a boy grows up and takes on the yoke of the mitzvot, he is then able to act within the physical world, and he becomes a participant in such holy acts as prayer. He is in fact obligated to perform the mitzvot, but this obligation is an expression of the great privilege that reveals the capabilities that he now has. He has an opportunity to allow the seed of holiness and innate worth with which he was born to grow and mature.

The next stage is building for the future, planting the seeds and creating a link to Bnei Yisrael, not only by virtue of the past or with current activity but with a deep and significant link to the chain of all the generations. This strong link is created when a person establishes a new home within the nation. The connection to the nation is no longer just a link to the past and the present but becomes a link to the generations of the future.

The power concealed within a couple who establish a new home is the strength of creation and activity, a power related to a strong attachment to the traits of the Almighty, who constantly creates new things. The Divine spirit that is instilled in the body of man takes the initial point that is within man, develops and improves it, and enhances the embryo until it emerges into the world.

Shifrah and Puah, the Jewish midwives, were partners from the beginning of the process of creating the nation of Yisrael. The Midrash describes their

actions and their importance to the Jewish women. But more important than anything else is the testimony of the Torah about them, "They kept the children alive" [Shemot 1:17]. The courageous act of the midwives had the effect of giving the new children life. Shifrah and Puah cared for both the children and the mothers, and by their very existence and their essence they served as a driving force for the women of Yisrael. It was because of them that the women had somebody available who supported and took care of them when they came to give birth, and in this way the midwives planted in the women the beginning of the process of redemption and the existence of the nation-not only at a physical, numeric, and physiological level but first and foremost in the essential, basic, and foundational plane, related to the development of the spirit and the resistance of the nation.

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi?

This week we begin the second book of the Torah, the book of Exodus. The book relates the history of the People of Israel from their beginnings in the land of Egypt through the Exodus from Egypt and the Revelation at Sinai. The final chapters of the book relate some of the mitzvot received at Sinai and the laws relating to the construction of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. Below we look at a verse about God's command to Moses to take the Elders of Israel to meet Pharaoh and request freedom for the People of Israel.

"They will listen to your voice and then you and the Elders of Israel will come to the king of Egypt and say to him 'Hashem, the God of the Hebrews, happened to [meet with] us. Please let us go a way of three days into the wilderness to offer a sacrifice to Hashem, our God.'" (Exodus 3:18)

"Happened to [meet with] us"-RASHI: "[The word 'nikra' with a 'heh' at the end] means 'happened.' Similarly, 'And Hashem happened to meet.' Or, 'And I will be met by Him here.'"

Rashi points out the meaning of the word "nikrah" here which seems a bit strange and inappropriate. The root "karah" (with a "heh" at the end), means "happened" as if by accident. A similar word, "karah," (with an alef at the end) on the other hand, means "called." The latter would seem most appropriate here. God called to them. But our verse has the unusual word "karah" meaning "happened," Rashi comes to clarify its meaning. He cites some other verses where God called to someone and yet the Torah used this word "karah."

So Rashi tells us that although the use of this word here is unusual, it is not unique. There are other places in the Torah where the word is used to mean called although its basic sense is "happened."

The difference between the use of these words in the context of God's speaking to man-this is what we

refer to as prophecy-is that sometimes the prophecy is more intentional and other times it is more "happenstance," so to speak. Then the appropriate word is "nikrah." The word "nikrah" (with an alef), on the other hand, would mean directly calling, in a full-fledged prophecy. It seems, for whatever reason, that the prophecy in our verse was of the lower level.

Compare our verse with verse 5:3. and ask your question: In verse 5:3 Moses and Aaron confront Pharaoh with the message which, in our verse, God had commanded them to convey. They repeat the same words from our verse, yet the word "nikrah" is spelled with an "alef" and not a "heh." Since it is a quote from our verse, we should expect the exact same word to be used. But it is different! Why? Can you think of an answer to this puzzle?

An Answer: Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, zt'l, in his Torah commentary Oznayim LaTorah offers the following explanation. When Hashem told Moses to go to Pharaoh, he told him to take the Elders of Israel with him. Rashi tells us (in verse 5:3) that, one by one, the Elders abandoned Moses and Aaron on their way to Pharaoh. They were afraid to confront this mighty ruler. Apparently these Elders were not of the highest spiritual calibre. Granted that they were the leaders of the People, but this was relative to the spiritually low state of the nation as a whole, at that time.

Thus, when Hashem spoke to Moses and the Elders, His prophecy was of a lower nature due to the audience, the Elders, who were not on a permanent level for receiving prophecy. Thus the word "nikrah" (with a "heh") was used. Their prophecy was, so to speak, an accidental or circumstantial event. It "happened" but only because of the need of the hour.

On the other hand, when Moses and Aaron finally arrived at Pharaoh's palace, they were alone-the Elders had left them. These two men were certainly on a permanent, and not accidental, level of prophecy. Thus in that verse the word is "nikrah" with an "alef," meaning that God actually called to us in a bona fide prophecy.

I had been bothered by the discrepancy between these two verses for many years. Then I saw Rabbi Sorotzkin's explanation, which truly satisfied me. It only goes to show, that while the mysteries of the Torah are many, with thought and faith they can be reasonably explained. © 2006 Dr. A. Bonchek & torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Pushing the Envelope

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

First Moshe responds, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" (Exodus 3:11) After Hashem assures

him of his ability Moshe asks, "When I go to the nation and they ask me, 'what is His name?' what shall I say?" (Exodus 3:14)

Hashem responds again. Then Moshe respectfully demurs, "But they will not believe me, and they will not heed my voice, they will say "Hashem did not appear to you!" (Exodus 4:1) Again Hashem responds by giving Moshe two miraculous signs that he, when challenged, should in turn show to the Jewish nation. And again Moshe is hesitant. "Please my L-rd," he cries, "I am not a man of words, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech." Once again Hashem rejoins, "Who made a mouth for man or makes one deaf, or dumb, sighted or blind? Is it not I, Hashem!" (Exodus 4:10-11)

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

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

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

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

After a brief turnaround, things began to fall apart. Soon a crisis erupted, the employees were disgruntled, and chaos began to reign. The Board of Directors were once again looking to make major

changes, and the unseasoned executive's job was on the line. As hard as the young executive tried to calm the situation, it was futile. He locked himself in his office and opened the first envelope. In small but clear typewritten letters were the words, "Blame your predecessor." He followed the advice but the results were short-lived. The following weeks were not productive. In fact, things were getting worse. It was time for the second envelope.

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

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

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

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

Summarized by Betzalel Posy

The Ramban believes that each of the five books of Chumash has its own theme. At the beginning of Sefer Shemot, he relates to both Bereishit and Shemot, since his introduction to Bereishit deals with Torah generally. Sefer Bereishit is about creation and history: both the creation of the world and the creation of Am Yisrael. These events serve as an example and a pattern for the history following them, and Sefer Shemot is the beginning of that history.

The entire history of the Jewish People follows a single pattern: "galut" and "ge'ula" (exile and redemption). This is what happened to the Avot and it is what happened to the Jews in Egypt and the desert. For Am Yisrael, their exile was expressed by their presence in Egypt, and their redemption was expressed by the presence of G-d in the mishkan.

However, the Ramban's words raise an interesting problem. Where is Eretz Yisrael in his discussion? Is not the redemption incomplete until the arrival forty years later in the Promised Land? How could the Ramban, for whom Eretz Yisrael was so central, say that the ge'ula occurred in the middle of a desert?

The entire Torah is a tale of how the Jews reached Israel. Rashi says as much in parashat Vayeshev. While, with regard to all other nations, the Torah simply tells us that they got their land ("Eileh toldot Eisav be-har Se'ir, etc."), the toldot of Yaakov and the story of how his children inherited the land is quite lengthy. Why do we need to hear every detail?

The normal situation is that every nation has its homeland: the French have France, the Belgians Belgium, etc. Thus, Am Yisrael receiving Eretz Yisrael is within the normal workings of the world. Ge'ula, in the religious sense of the word, occurs when Am Yisrael reaches the level of its forefathers. There might be only a very short period when this goal is realized, such as part of the time in the desert and some of the period of the first Temple. But this sad historical reality in no way detracts from the fact that this is the ideal situation.

Just as this ge'ula can occur at Har Sinai, so too the mere presence of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael does not assure redemption. Many people have said that with our return to Israel, we have reached redemption. But ge'ula is not about land, being like the French or the Belgians, although that is important. We still have a long way to go; we cannot sit back and rest.

As a child in chutz la-aretz, I heard from a Maggid a very interesting parable. In a small shtetl, there was a shamash (beadle) named Yankele. Yankele the shamash was a tzaddik. He stayed up late at night cleaning and fixing the beit midrash; he serviced all the public facilities; he made sure everything in the synagogue was ready for the holidays. Whenever needed, he gave the daily shiur, and served as chazzan when there was no one else. During the week before Rosh Hashana, he would stay up all night cleaning the synagogue and then would wake everyone in the town before daybreak for selichot.

On erev Rosh Hashana, selichot were especially early, and after a week of hard work, Yankele could barely keep his eyes open. He would recite "Hashem, Hashem..." and nod off. The mischievous youths started throwing things at him to wake him up. "What do you want from me?" Yankele exclaimed. "All year long I work hard for you; let me live in peace!" "Yankele," they answered him, "you wake us up for selichot at five in the morning, and you expect us to allow you to fall asleep!?"

For two thousand years, Am Yisrael disturbed the peaceful slumber of the world. We woke up the nations of the world to the values of tzedek and yosher (justice and righteousness), trying to remind them of their duties and conscience. Finally, Am Yisrael came home, to the "menucha ve-nachala;" but the nations of the world will not let us rest.

No, there is no ge'ula until Benei Yisrael "higi'u le- ramat avotam"— reach the level of their forefathers. (Originally delivered on Leil Shabbat Parashat Shemot 5757.)