

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah emphasizes the names of the family of Yaakov in this week's parsha as it did in even greater detail in last week's parsha of Vayechi. There may be many varied reasons for this concentration of interest in the names of the tribes of Israel. But whatever the reasons are, the Torah obviously feels it to be of great importance. In fact, throughout the Torah the names of the tribes are repeated many times. After all, we might ask, what is in a name? But the names of our ancestors are drummed into us by the Torah to provide us with a sense of continuity and tradition.

The Jewish people are about to experience centuries of exile and eventual slavery in Egypt. They are certainly in danger of being destroyed both physically and spiritually. The rabbis taught us that by not forgetting their original names, by not completely becoming Egyptian in deed as well, the hope of the Jewish people to be redeemed and freed never died out. The names of their ancestors reminded them of their past and of the commitment of G-d to redeem them from their bondage and afflictions.

This experience of Egyptian exile imbedded within the Jewish world the importance of remembering our original names. For it was the existence and use of those names that prevented their extinction as a special and eternal people. Thus, in the introduction to the book of Shmot, the book of bondage and redemption, is the list of names of the sons of Yaakov, the eternal reminder of who the Jewish people really are.

Over the centuries, the Jewish people have continually struggled to retain their identity and sense of continuity through their names. In the Ashkenazic world it became customary to name children after deceased ancestors. This became a deeply emotional bond in families, ultimately leading to children being given multiple names to commemorate more than one ancestor. In the Sephardic tradition names are given to honor living grandparents and relatives. But there also the sense of continuity and purpose is stressed in the granting of those names.

In more modern times Jews were given secular names as well to be used in general society. However, over the last few decades the use of exclusively Jewish or Hebrew names has become in vogue once again. So

apparently there is a great deal involved in a name. Even in the non-Jewish world, the use of biblical names remains quite popular and widespread. People hunger for a connection to their past and such traditional, biblical, family names seem to provide a sense of immortality and continuity that flashy "cool" names cannot provide.

Names can therefore be an anchor to one's own self-worth and purpose in life. The Torah's insistence on recording the names of the sons of Yaakov - the eventual tribes of Israel - highlights this important fact of life and family to us. Perhaps this is what Midrash meant when it taught us that one of the causes of the redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage was "that they [the Jewish people] did not change their names [from Hebrew ones to Egyptian ones.]" © 2007 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.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

One of the most mysterious passages in the Torah is the affair of Tzipora and the circumcision of her son. This takes up only three verses, but there are many difficulties with it, beginning with two main questions: Why did the Almighty want to kill Moshe after he had already started out on the way to his great mission? Why did Tziporah perform the circumcision, and how did this action influence Moshe's subsequent success? We will briefly attempt to understand one aspect of this passage in the hopes that it will shed some light and clarify some of the unclear aspects of the events.

Some parallels can be seen between this passage (Shemot 4:24-26) and a different one in the Torah? Yaacov's struggle with the angel (Bereishit 32:25-33). In both cases, a major figure (Yaacov/Moshe) is on his way back to his birthplace (Canaan/Egypt) in response to a command by the Almighty (Yaacov: "And G-d said to Yaacov, go back to the land of your fathers" [Bereishit 31:3]. Moshe: "And G-d said to Moshe in Midyan, return to Egypt" [Shemot 4:19].) In both cases, the figure has a sudden encounter, in the middle of the night. (Yaacov: "He

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spent the night in the camp" [Bereishit 32:22]. Moshe: "It happened on the way, in the hotel" [Shemot 4:24].) It is a struggle with a figure representing the Almighty. (Yaacov: "For you have fought with G-d..." [Bereishit 32:29]. Moshe: "G-d met him and wanted to kill him" [Shemot 4:24].) In both cases, the main figure is saved but suffers some type of physical injury. With respect to Yaacov, we are told, "And he touched the tendon on his thigh, and Yaacov's tendon was injured during the struggle with him" [Bereishit 32:26]. With respect to Moshe, it is written, "And Tziporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin (orlah), and she reached his legs" [Shemot 24:25]. In both cases, a new and unique identity of the main figure is revealed. Yaacov's name is changed, "For you have fought with G-d and with people and you have succeeded" [bereishit 32:29], while Tziporah tells Moshe, "You are a groom of blood for me" [Shemot 24:25]. Note also that after the dramatic events, both Yaacov and Moshe meet their brothers, whom they have not seen for a long time. Yaacov meets Eisav, "And Eisav ran towards him and hugged him, and he fell on his neck and kissed him" [Bereishit 33:4]. And Moshe meets Aharon, "And he went and met him on the divine mountain and he kissed him" [Shemot 4:27]. All of this leads to an obvious question: What is the significance of the great similarity between the two events?

Both of these men were about to meet a very threatening adversary. Evidently the two events were meant to strengthen each man before the difficult meeting ahead. As we noted in our article for the portion of Vayishlach, the purpose for Yaacov was to prove that he could overcome other people, since he was even able to get the best of an angel. The meeting for Moshe was even more critical, requiring not physical but spiritual action, to show that he had completely severed himself from the culture in which he lived and identified with the nation of Yisrael, by the act of removing the foreskin. Evidently his apparent lack of identification with Yisrael was connected to Moshe's reaction in his dialogue with the Almighty, when he repeatedly tried to refuse the mission that he was given. Moshe needed Tziporah's help with this, in that she was the one who understood what was needed to save her husband and to strengthen him before his fateful encounter with Pharaoh.

RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG

Between the Lines

This week, we begin the Book of Exodus. One of the primary events of this week's portion is the story of the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2). It seems odd that G-d would choose to appear to Moses in this way. Why was a bush necessary at all? Couldn't G-d have appointed Moses as the redeemer of the Jewish people without a Burning Bush, in the same way that He appeared to the other prophets?

The Slonimer Rebbe helps us resolve this question by distinguishing between the two parts of the Burning Bush: (1) the fire on the outside, and (2) the bush on the inside. According to his interpretation, the fire represents all the impurities of the world-in particular, the impurities of Egypt. Fire symbolizes burning passions that can cause one to yield to temptation, and that have the ability to consume any obstacle that stands in their way. The bush, on the other hand, symbolizes the spiritual strength that each of us carries deep within. This inner strength is an eternal core that can never be consumed.

Moses saw how steeped the Jewish people were in the impurities of Egyptian society. He thought that the people would never be able to rise above their degraded spiritual state because he assumed they were satisfied with their current level. This could have been a tragic misconception. According to the Admor of Kuvrin, the worst thing we can do is to sell ourselves short. Once we convince ourselves that we will never be able to grow beyond our current level, we actually prevent ourselves from achieving our ultimate potential!

This is why G-d tells Moses, "I have seen (ra'oh ra'iti) the affliction of My people in Egypt" (Exodus 3:7). The Midrash (Shmot Raba 3:2) points out that the verb "to see" appears in two forms in this verse. This double language hints to G-d's penetrating vision-as if G-d were saying to Moses, "You see with only one pair of eyes, but I see with an additional pair." Before the revelation at the Burning Bush, Moses lacked faith in the Jewish people's ability to overcome the challenges in their path and grow to greater levels. Moses saw only the fires of impurity on the outside.

G-d, however, saw the people's inner spiritual power-a strength that, like the bush, would never be destroyed. Moses needed to experience the Burning Bush in order to develop confidence in the people's ability to shed their surface impurity and tap into their powerful spiritual core.

May we always be satisfied with our material state of being (as it says in Avot 4:1, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion"), but never be satisfied with our spiritual achievements. We should take pleasure in what we have accomplished thus far, but not see our current achievements as indicators of our ultimate potential. And may we have the courage to

tap into our deepest inner essence and constantly grow, no matter what fires we may have played with on the outside. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.org

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

The famine that besieged Egypt and the rest of the world had come to an end. Joseph, along with the entire generation, had all passed away. And: "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Joseph." (Exodus 1:8)

Is it really possible that anyone—let alone a king—would be unaware of all that Joseph had done for the country? How could anyone in Egypt ever forget the vital role he played its survival? Joseph, as second in command and sole architect of making Egypt the richest country on Earth, should have been immortalized for eternity. It defies logic that anyone could forget the one person who single-handedly saved Egypt and the entire world from famine.

Joseph wasn't forgotten in the sense that no one "remembered" him. Rather, the significance of his life-saving contributions had simply faded from everyone's memory.

Joseph's insights and acumen clearly saved the lives of every man, woman, and child. But as soon as the necessity of his contributions were no longer needed, then the appreciation for Joseph ceased as well. When the pain of Egypt's experience ended, so did their memory of Joseph.

During the massive famine that spread throughout the entire world, Joseph was at the center of it all. Every country was dependent upon Egypt for their survival. But when the famine ended, then Joseph's help was no longer valuable or even needed. And, over time, the mental leap that someone makes from when a person's contributions are no longer needed and the memory of when they were so desperately needed becomes smaller and smaller. And after an entire generation passed away, the people in Egypt simply did not know of Joseph.

Difficult to imagine? It actually occurs in our own lives all the time. Think about it. There are people who have helped you enormously in the past in one way or another. And when they gave you their assistance—whatever it might have been—you certainly expressed your gratitude. But as time went on, it's just not natural to continue to shower the person with appreciation and gratitude.

But this doesn't mean that you can't let them know "out of the blue" once again just how much you appreciate what they did for you. Saying "thank you" to the person long after they've given you their help, is such a beautiful and selfless way to live. And the recipient will appreciate it beyond words.

It is very easy to forget people who were there for us, because once their assistance is no longer

needed, our appreciation for what they did can easily fade away. And as more and more time passes, we can actually completely forget those people who were there for us when we needed them the most.

It's not that hard to show appreciation toward someone right after he's helped you. But the true measure of a person is not demonstrated by the gratitude you show a person after he's helped you. Rather, the measure of a person is demonstrated by the heartfelt gratitude he can still show long after the fact. True gratitude is not defined by a person who doesn't forget; it's defined by the one who always remembers. Make the call today. © 2007 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.ocm

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

The scene has always fascinated thinkers, artists and people from every walk of life. Moses stands in the distance looking up in awe at the mountaintop where a bush is burning vigorously—without being consumed! Suddenly, the voice of Hashem speaks to him from amidst this wondrous spectacle, commanding him to remove his shoes and come nearer. This is the setting in which Moses is appointed as the divine messenger to go down to Egypt and lead the Jewish people to freedom.

But why did Hashem choose to communicate through such a spectacular manifestation as an indestructible burning bush? Why didn't He address Moses directly as He would any other prophet? And why did He command Moses to remove his shoes before coming near?

The commentators explain that, although he had fled Egypt many years before, Moses never forgot the plight of his unfortunate Jewish brothers and sisters in Egyptian bondage. Even as he lived in the relative serenity of Midian, he could find no peace. His mind was filled with images of Jews struggling under heavy burdens of bricks and cement, suffering the tongue-lashes and whiplashes of their Egyptian taskmasters. What would happen to the Jewish people? How long would they have to suffer such terrible agonies? These questions gave Moses no rest. He himself may have been in Midian, but his heart was enslaved with his people amidst the bricks and mortar of Egypt.

Hashem provided the answers to his questions in the most vivid form through the metaphor of the burning bush. The bush sitting alone atop a mountain in the wilderness symbolized the Jewish people trapped in the desperate desolation of exile and enslavement, stripped of their physical freedom and their spiritual greatness. The fire symbolized the terrible suffering of the Jewish people. But fire is an ambivalent thing. It is a destroyer, but it can also give warmth and light. A fire is raging inside this bush, Hashem was telling Moses, but

there is another aspect to this fire which you cannot see. The Divine Presence resides within this very fire. The terrible ordeal which this fire represents will not destroy the Jewish people. On the contrary, it is a crucible which will forge them into a great people, and cement an everlasting bond between Myself and them, My chosen people. It will make them strong spiritually, and it will lead on the golden path of their destiny to the Giving of the Torah.

But why was it so difficult for Moses to view the suffering and afflictions of exile as an indispensable stage in Hashem's master plan?

The answer to this question, the commentators explain, was implicit in Hashem's command that Moses remove his shoes. Shoes empower and inhibit us at the same time. They help us walk on all types of terrain, but in order to accomplish this, they prevent the toes from exercising their sense of touch. The physical aspect of a person has a similar effect on him. It allows his soul to function in the physical world, but in doing so, it obscures his spiritual perception. The exile might seem inexplicable to Moses because he was "wearing his shoes," so to speak, because he was viewing it through the eyes of a mortal.

"Remove your shoes!" Hashem commanded him. Transcend your physical existence! Look with the spiritual eyes of the pure soul! Behold, the burning bush is not consumed! The promise symbolized by the burning bush—that the loving hands of Hashem are always there under the raging currents of our history—has been our consolation for thousands of years. Even in the best of times, we are in need of that consolation. Even as we enjoy prosperity and status in the Diaspora, our holy Temple, the glorious crown jewel of our nation, still lies in ruins, and our people are dispersed to the far corners of the earth. Even as we enjoy an uneasy respite in this seemingly endless exile, we still suffer physical persecution and spiritual deprivation. But if we look past our "shoes," we, too, will sense the Divine Presence among us. We, too, will discern the light that shines even in the densest darkness. © 2007 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

Why was Moses chosen to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt? And if, indeed, it is because he fearlessly slew the Egyptian taskmaster, does Moses' greatness lie in his concern for the people of Israel or is there a dimension of concern for universal humanity within Moses which sets him apart from all others? And finally, does the Bible only concentrate on pointing out the evil of the oppressor, or does the Bible also express the character flaws which likewise plague the oppressed, the enslaved, albeit through no fault of their own?

First things first. The Bible catalogues three acts of injustice and oppression against which Moses takes action: Egyptian against Hebrew, Hebrew against Hebrew and Midianite against Midianite. Clearly Moses fights injustice whoever happens to be the oppressor, whomever happens to be oppressed. Moreover, a careful scrutiny of the text will even further demonstrate Moses concern for universal humanity. "And it came to pass in those days when Moses was grown up, and he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian person (ish) smiting a Hebrew person (ish). . . And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw there was no person (ish), he smote the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand." (Ex. 2:11-12)

Clearly, the proliferation of the word ish seems superfluous. In the Hebrew language, Egyptian can stand alone for an Egyptian person as can the noun Hebrew mean a Hebrew person. Therefore the additional ish must come to emphasize the fundamental humanity which Moses saw both in the Egyptian as well as in the Hebrew.

Furthermore, But After Moses turns "this way and that way," the text again uses the word ish, but this time informing us that he did not see an ish, a person. Conventional wisdom would have it that Moses looked to see if anyone was watching when he was about to kill the Egyptian. However, on the second day, when he goes out and finds two Hebrews fighting, Moses castigates them for their behavior, and one counterattacks Moses, asking, "Who made you our prince and judge. . . Do you mean to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:4). Apparently either Moses was not looking about too carefully (highly unlikely), or our interpretation is found wanting.

Rashi comments that when Moses, prior to killing the Egyptian, looked "here and there", he wasn't looking to see if any Egyptian was watching who might report his action to Pharaoh, but he was rather looking into the future, to make sure that he wasn't about to kill someone from whom a great person was destined to emerge.

Another explanation invokes the principle of the Ethics of Our Fathers. "In a place where there are no people, strive to be a person" (Mishna Avot 2:6).

Moses was hoping that perhaps someone else, who wasn't from the palace of Pharaoh and for whom there would be less risk if he were discovered, might step forward and slay the taskmaster. But unfortunately there was no other person ready to act, so despite his high status, he had to live up to this challenge.

However, I believe that by building upon our initial interpretation, we will discover the truest meaning of the verse. Remember that the passage in question added the superfluous word ish three times, but then concludes, "he smote the Egyptian without the word ish. Why not?"

The Netziv (Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 1817-1893) explains that the Hebrew language possesses four basic terms for the human being: Adam, Gever, Enosh, Ish. The highest is the word ish literally a persona, an individual of stature, a personage. Indeed our Sages tell us that wherever there is an unidentified ish, in the Torah, we should know we're speaking about an angel (Gen. 37-15 and Rashi ad loc).

In the first verse, Moses saw two people, a Hebrew and an Egyptian. They started out as special people, each a personage within his own ethnic group. However as a result of the situation he found them in, one oppressing and the other being oppressed, upon more careful scrutiny he realized that neither one of them was an ish, a personage, neither the person who was doing the smiting - because he was acting in a cruel fashion and thereby diminishing the image of the Divine within himself - nor the individual who was being smitten - because his integrity as a free and capable child and partner of G-d has been compromised.

Tragically, the beaten wife believes she is worthy of being beaten, the raped woman feels guilty and the oppressed nation feels unequal and unworthy. As James Baldwin put it so well, I can forgive the whites for treating the blacks in an inferior manner, but I cannot forgive the whites for making the blacks feel that they are inferior.

The challenge in Israel today is to be strong enough never again to suffer as the smitten, sensitive enough never to abuse that strength and wise enough to prevent situations in which we smite any weak individual unfairly. Only then can our primarily civilian army hold onto its human integrity and emerge as an army of "persons," and only then can we hope to lead the world to a G-d of justice and compassion. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd [the new king] said to his people, 'behold the nation of the Children of Israel are [becoming] more numerous and stronger than we are. Let's devise a strategy against [them], so that they don't [continue to] increase, whereby if there is a war they will join our enemies and fight against us and go up from the land.' These verses (Shemos 1:9-10) signify the start of our slavery in Egypt.

Although Paro (Pharaoh) seemed concerned that as a result of joining with his enemies the Children of Israel would be able to leave the country, the Talmud (Sotah 11a) takes it for granted that his fear was not that "they" would leave but that "we" (the Egyptians) would be forced to leave. Rashi (there) explains that a perceived enemy leaving the country would be welcomed, not prevented, so Paro must have been concerned about the Egyptians being forced to leave

their own country. The Maharal says Paro would have been more concerned about Egyptians being killed than about the Jews leaving, so his fear must have been that they would have to run away in order to avoid being killed. The bottom line, though, is that despite numerous explanations being given as to why Paro would want to prevent the Jews from leaving, the Talmud understands Paro's fear to be that the Egyptians would be forced to leave, and, as Rashi adds, "and they (presumably referring to the Children of Israel) will inherit it (Egypt)."

Aside from the logistical issue of whether it would really be feasible for the entire population of Egypt to be transferred to other countries, being that Paro's concern started with being attacked by outside enemies and the nation living within his borders joining them, why would those other countries want to assimilate the entire Egyptian population within their own? They may want to loot Egypt (especially since Egypt had collected all the money from those other countries during the famine-see Baal Haturim), but would they really want take the entire Egyptian population back as prisoners?

Additionally, even if it were true that Paro was concerned that the Egyptians would be forced to leave their own country, why was he also concerned that afterwards "they will inherit it?" Once the Egyptians were chased out, does it really matter who is living there? This question becomes magnified based on the way the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel understands Paro's fear.

"And it will be when a war is waged against us that they will join with our enemies and wipe us out, without even one of us remaining, and after that they will go out of the land." While according to Rashi, Paro was afraid that after the Egyptians are forced to leave Egypt the Children of Israel will take over the land, the Targum Yonasan says that Paro was afraid that after the Egyptians were all killed the Children of Israel will go up from the land. Why would they care who was still in Egypt if they weren't, and why would it bother them if the Children of Israel left if they (the Egyptians) were dead?

Which "enemies" was Paro afraid would attack that the Children of Israel would join? The Sefer Hayashar says Paro was afraid that Avraham's descendants would unite. There had recently been a war where Edom (the descendants of Yaakov's brother, Eisav), Yishmael and the "Benai Kedem" (the nations that descended from the children of Keturah, whom Avraham had married after Sarah died) had attacked Egypt. Egypt suffered horrific losses and was about to lose the war until a battalion of Israelites took over the battle and reversed the tide. However, the Israelites were upset that the Egyptians had all fled the battlefield, leaving them to fight the powerful enemy alone, and took revenge against many of the deserters.

Having seen that his army was already vulnerable, Paro was afraid that next time the Israelites would join with their cousins, and Egypt would lose.

Although the common understanding might be that Paro's fear was that all of Egypt would be forced to leave, it seems that Paro was really afraid of a regime change. His subjects would remain in Egypt, but he would either be forced to flee or be killed. The Children of Israel had already proven, through Yosef, that they were capable of successfully governing the country, and after the Egyptian government would be overthrown by a coalition of Avraham's descendants, they could easily step in and take over the governance. If there were no other candidates to govern Egypt, at least Paro would be a puppet ruler, keeping his local power but forced to pay taxes (etc.) to the conquering powers. However, now that there was an internal entity that could keep things stable locally, there would be no need to keep the current government at all.

When Paro implies that "they will arise from the land," he may not be referring to leaving the land altogether, but to "rising to power" within the land (see Bechor Shor and Hakesav Vehakabala) or "rising from their land," i.e. from Goshen, to get more involved in the rest of Egypt (see Ramban). As a result, the current government will be removed and either wiped out (according to the Targum Yonasan) or be forced to flee (according to Rashi, based on the Talmud). The "we" Paro refers to ("and we will go up from the land" or "none of us will be left alive") is his inner circle of advisors and officers, as Paro tells them that we better develop a strategy to stop the growth rate of the Children of Israel, or else we'll be out and a new government will take over. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Who were the midwives that were asked by Pharaoh to kill the newborn Jewish males? (Exodus 1:15, 16) Their identity is critical because they deserve a tremendous amount of credit. In the end, at great personal risk, they "did not do as the King of Egypt commanded them, but saved the boys." (Exodus 1:17)

Rashi insists that the midwives were Jewish women. They were Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moshe respectively. For Rashi, the term meyaldot ha-ivriyot (Exodus 1:15) is to be understood literally, as the Hebrew midwives.

Sforno disagrees. He insists that the midwives were actually non-Jews. For Sforno, meyaldot ha-ivriyot is to be understood as the midwives of the Hebrews.

What stands out as almost shocking in Rashi's interpretation is the actual request. Pharaoh asks Jews to murder other Jews, believing they would commit heinous crimes against their own people. Tragically, this phenomenon has occurred at certain times in

history-tyrants successfully convinced Jews to turn against their own people.

On the other hand, what stands out in Sforno's interpretation is the response. In the end, the non-Jewish midwives, at great personal risk, were prepared to save Jews. This has also occurred in history-the preparedness of non-Jews to stand up to authority and intervene on behalf of Jews.

Sforno mirrors the time in which he lived. As part of renaissance Italy in the 15th century, he was a universalist par excellence. He believed that non-Jews would stand up and risk their lives to help Jews.

Rashi, hundreds of years before, lived in a different world. Living before the Crusades, he could never imagine that non-Jews would stand up against the Pharaoh and save Jews.

Without this watershed moment in our history of standing up in the face of evil, there may have been no nation of Israel. Yet, there is no consensus as to the identity of these heroines. Only G-d knows for sure.

In this world where heroism sadly is defined by who sinks the winning shot or has the most money or sings the greatest music, we must remember this important lesson. Most of the time, we don't know who the true heroes are. Many who are given honor are undeserving. Others, who deserve honor, remain forever unknown.

It is G-d alone, who really knows. © 2007 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV BINYAMIN TABORY SHLIT"A

Summarized by Shaul Barth; Translated by Kaeren Fish

Early in the dialogue between G-d and Moshe at the burning bush, Moshe asks: "When they say to me, What is His Name? -- what shall I say to them?" (Shemot 3:13). G-d answers: "He said: Eh-yeh asher Eh-yeh. And He said: Thus shall you say to Bnei Yisrael: Eh-yeh sent me to you" (3:14).

Rashi (based on Berakhot 9b) discusses the difference between "Eh-yeh asher Eh-yeh" (literally, "I shall be what I shall be") and "Eh-yeh sent me to you," explaining that at first G-d was telling Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael that His essence was "Eh-yeh (I shall be) with you in this distress; I will also be with you in other distresses." Then Moshe asked why it was necessary to allude to future distress, and G-d agreed with him, and told him to tell Bnei Yisrael only that "Eh-yeh sent me to you."

One of the things that a person has to know at all times is that G-d is with us, and that even in dark and difficult times He helps us. A deeper understanding

of the words tells us that G-d is "with us in suffering," meaning that He, too, suffers: "Even when I walk through the valley of shadow of death, I shall fear no evil, for You are with me" (Tehillim 23:4). The fact that G-d is with us and that He, too, is suffering, provides a certain measure of comfort to Bnei Yisrael in exile.

Rabbi Chayim of Volozhin taught that a person who prays for Israel to be saved from their troubles and suffering should intend, first and foremost, to pray for the redemption of G-d Himself, as it were, and not only the redemption of Israel. There have been non-Jewish religious philosophers who have questioned why a sick person should pray to be healed. After all, if one is sick, is that not G-d's will? Rabbi Chayim declares that prayer is not for oneself but rather for G-d; He too suffers, as it were, from one's illness. This is the meaning of "Eh-yeh (I shall be) with them in this trouble."

A reading of the works of Rabbi Soloveitchik shows that he truly feels that G-d is with him in every crisis, and this is what helps him get through it. In the parashot of the weeks gone by we read, "G-d, Who has watched over me (ha-ro'eh oti) from the beginning until this day" (Bereishit 48:15). There are some commentators (e.g. Ramban) who understand the expression, "ro'eh oti" as being derived from the word "re'a," meaning fellow or friend. We know that the commandment "You shall love your fellow as yourself" (Vayikra 19:18) is a great principle in the Torah (Yerushalmi Nedarim 9:4), but what is meant by the commandment "You shall love the Lord your G-d" (Devarim 6:5)? If we think of G-d as a person's fellow, as it were, then the question is solved. The Kuzari teaches that G-d accompanies a person at all times, and we must believe in G-d because He accompanied our forefathers at all times, and all those Jews who came before me believed in Him.

Ramban (3:13) explains that "Eh-yeh" is G-d's name, equivalent to the more familiar Tetragrammaton, and he connects it to divine wisdom. The dispute between Ramban and Rashi is a fundamental one pertaining to the connection between man and G-d. It is a simple connection based on the fact that a person senses G-d, or is it a faith that must be based on profound thought and philosophical study? The dispute between Rashi and Ramban parallels that between the Kuzari and the Ramban.

There is no doubt that Torah scholars should combine some of each element. Scholars, who tend toward the intellectual, must realize that faith is not attained merely through philosophical study; there must be some personal bond, some sense of G-d's presence. A German Jewish scholar once wrote a book about man's relation to G-d. He showed his book to a rabbi. The rabbi read his book and finally commented: "It's a wonderful book-but where is G-d?" In other words, this scholar had attained great insights, but

somewhere along the way he had lost the simple faith in G-d and His Torah.

On the other hand, simply maintaining one's simple faith, and remaining at the spiritual level of a child throughout one's life, is not a worthy option either. We need to know that there are two ways of understanding the verse: "This is my G-d (E-li) and I shall praise Him, the G-d (Elokei) of my fathers-and I shall exalt Him" (Shemot 15:2). The verse embodies two fundamental approaches to the idea of closeness to G-d. On one hand, G-d is "E-li"-my G-d, with Whom I have developed a profound bond. On the other hand, He is "Elokei avi"- the G-d in Whom I have faith by virtue of my forefathers and our tradition. (*This sicha was delivered on Shabbat parashat Shemot 5763 [2002].*)

RABBI ZEV LEFF

Outlooks & Insights

“**T**he Egyptians started to make the Israelites do labor designated to break their bodies.” (Exodus 1:13) In order to keep the Israelites occupied so that they would not have time to think about Moses' words heralding their freedom, Pharaoh decreed that henceforth the Jewish slaves would have to collect their own straw while maintaining their previous quota of bricks. Why did Pharaoh not just double their quota? In that way, he would have forced the Israelites to work harder and would have benefited from a doubling of production.

The Torah describes our labor in Egypt as *avodas parech*, literally, work that breaks the person. *Avodas parech* is defined as work that has no purpose and is designed just to keep the slave busy (see Maimonides Laws of Servants 11:6). We are specifically forbidden to work a Jewish servant in this fashion (Leviticus 25:43).

Pharaoh understood that nothing so diminishes a person as seeing no purpose to his activity, no result in which he can take pride. Thus he had Jewish slaves build *arei miskenos*, which can be translated as pitiful cities. These cities, says the Midrash, were built on the foundations of sand, and toppled over immediately after being built, only to be rebuilt again. Thus, doubling the Israelites' workload without doubling production, fit perfectly into Pharaoh's plans.

Work can be exhilarating, fulfilling and ennobling, but only when it is *melachah*-purposeful work, work with a goal. But purposeless work (*avodah*) only serves to break a person's spirit. A prisoner in a Soviet labor camp was confined to his cell for ten years and forced to turn a handle that protruded from his cell wall. He was told that the handle turned a flour mill on the other side, but upon being liberated, discovered that the handle was connected to nothing. The realization that he had labored for nothing was more crushing to him than the ten years of imprisonment.

The Talmud (Beitzah 16a) calls the Babylonians foolish for eating their bread with bread. The ba'alei mussar (Jewish ethicists) explain that they were caught in a vicious cycle with no purpose other than its own perpetuation. They worked only in order to earn enough bread to have the strength to work another day and earn more bread to sustain themselves for another day. Working to eat so that one can work some more results in a life with no purpose. When the necessity of earning a living is removed from such a life it loses all meaning. That is why so many retirees become depressed, and even suicidal, when they stop working.

Those with Torah are spared this plight, for they realize that everything they do is to secure eternal life in Olam Haba, the World to Come. This recognition gives meaning and value to all of life's pursuits, for the greater the purpose and goal, the more significant the effort.

"Six days shall you labor (ta'avod) and do all your 'melachah,' and the seventh day will be a Sabbath to Your G-d..." (Exodus 20:9-10). What transforms a person's menial labor (avodah) into purposeful, creative activity (melachah) is Shabbos, the taste of Olam Haba in this world. The word parech can be figured with a numerical value of 39, corresponding to the 39 melachos of Shabbos, the creative activities that went into building and maintaining the Mishkan. Thus the opposite of avodas parech-aimless, purposeless work-is meleches hamishkan, meleches Shabbos-purposeful work that leads to eternal results.

Women many times feel that their work is avodas parech, with no lasting results. The clean clothes are soon soiled again, the house messed up as soon as it is straightened. The result of hours of toil in the kitchen are not framed and saved for perpetuity, but quickly devoured. The key to making these chores ennobling and exhilarating is constantly remembering their ultimate goal the creation of an atmosphere enabling each member of the family to function properly and develop his or her ultimate potential.

Moses was initially instructed to tell Pharaoh that the Jews wanted to leave Egypt for three days of celebration and sacrifice in the desert. Pharaoh was not told of the real intent of their departure so that he could exercise his free will. Had he been told that the Jews wished to leave forever, he could not possibly have granted their request. The Israelites, on the other hand, had to be told the truth about their departure even though the prospect of having to conquer the Land might fill them with dread, for the ultimate goal of the Land of Israel gave meaning to the entire Exodus.

In this light, we can understand the following Midrash: "Moses proclaimed, 'I sinned with the word az, and I will rectify [my sin] with the word az. I sinned by saying 'From when (me'az) I approached Pharaoh to speak in Your name, things have gotten worse for the

Jewish people' (Exodus 5:23). And I will rectify [my sin] with the word az-'Then (az) Moses will sing the song at the Red Sea' (Exodus 15:1)."

Moses sinned by isolating a moment-Pharaoh's decree of additional labor- and not placing it in the perspective of the ultimate goal. Had Moses seen the decree as one more stage toward the eventual Redemption, he would have viewed it differently. Moses rectified his error when he sang at the Splitting of the Sea not only for the moment of present salvation, but for all the future redemptions until the resurrection of the dead. Thus he sang in the future tense.

The Mishnah in Avos (1:3) says that one should not serve G-d in order to receive reward. Maimonides (Laws of Teshuva 10:1) explains the reward referred to includes even the reward of Olam Haba for fulfilling the Mitzvot. Rather, one should serve G-d out of pure love and devotion, with no ulterior motive at all. Yet the Torah is full of verses that exhort us to observe its commandments "in order that you live" or "in order that your days be multiplied," (see e.g., Exodus 20:12, Deut. 4:1, 4:40, et. al.) -- which are understood as referring to eternal life.

The resolution of this seeming contradiction is that the knowledge that the Mitzvot result in eternal life gives added dimension and significance to the performance of the Mitzvah itself-apart from any concern with the reward of Olam Haba-and thereby engenders greater love for the commandments. In this context, does not mean "in order that," referring to a consequence of the performance of the Mitzvot, but rather "because" in the sense of revealing the true significance of the Mitzvot. Recognition of that significance enhances the love of the Creator, Who bestowed His creation with eternal meaning.

To truly appreciate the significance of our mundane pursuits and the Mitzvot that constitute our service of G-d, we must be constantly aware of our ultimate goal of bringing the world to perfection by fulfilling G-d's will. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.org

RABBI ZEV ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

[Moses] saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man, one of his brothers. He looked all around, and saw that there was no one. He hit the Egyptian and covered him with sand. (Exodus 2:11-12) The implication from this verse is that when Moses hit the Egyptian, he intended to kill him. In fact, the lethal blow was an accident. Moses just wanted to stop the Egyptian from beating the Hebrew, and did not mean to kill him. This should teach us to be careful of our actions.

Even though our intentions may very well be good, we will still be held responsible for the consequences of our actions, however unwanted and unforeseen (R. Saadia Gaon). © 1994 Rabbi Z. Itzkowitz