

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

**A**lthough he was raised as Egyptian royalty, Moshe "went out to his brothers" (Shemos 2:11) and saw an Egyptian hitting (and trying to kill, see Shemos Rabbah 1:28) "one of his Hebrew brethren." Who was this fellow Jew? According to Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezar (48), it was someone from the family of Moshe's grandfather, Kehas; the second "brother" in the verse doesn't mean just a "landsman," but a closer relative (hence the need to further define the "Hebrew" being attacked as "one of his brothers"). Midrash Tanchuma (Shemos 9) identifies him as the husband of Shelomis bas Divri, who was the mother of the "megadef," the blasphemer that was put to death in Vayikra (24:10-23). Since many Midrashic sources say that she was from the tribe of Dun, with some saying that her husband was also from Dun (see Rebbe Yosi's opinion, quoted in Pirkay d'Rebbe Eliezer 48), the "Hebrew" that Moshe saved was not a close relative of his, but, because he was an MOT, someone that Moshe still considered a "brother." Shemos Rabbah (1:28) says that the person Moshe saved was none other than Dasan, the same Dasan who was a thorn in Moshe's side till the day the earth swallowed him up along with the rest of Korach's group (Bamidbar 16:23-33). As pointed out by Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg (footnote 6 of his first piece on Parashas Shemos in "Bais Efrayim") this third possibility poses a bit of a problem.

It was Dasan who was fighting with Aviram the next day (see Rashi, based on Shemos Rabbah 1:29), and when Moshe tried to break it up, Dasan protested, accusing him of trying to appoint himself as their leader (Shemos 2:14). Included in this protest was mockingly asking if Moshe planned on killing him too, just as he had killed the Egyptian. This caused Moshe to become afraid, as "surely the incident is now known." However, if it was Dasan that Moshe had saved a day earlier, it could not have been a surprise that he knew what Moshe had done. Why was Moshe now so frightened, based on Dasan's referencing his having killed the Egyptian, if it was obvious that Dasan already knew about it?

It should be noted that (as inferred by Rabbi Weinberg) the Midrash understands Moshe's newfound knowledge to be a realization as to why, of all the nations, the Children of Israel were singled out to be

treated so harshly. After all, now that "lashon hara" was evident, their suffering was no longer that surprising. Nevertheless, aside from the nature of this "lashon hara" needing to be explained (as well as why it caused Moshe to become gripped by fear), the most straightforward way of understanding Moshe's statement (see Rashi) is that until now he thought that no one knew what he had done, but now realized that it was not a secret. As a matter of fact, the Radal (on the Midrash Rabbah) alters the text to say that it was Dasan's sister (not his wife) that had been taken advantage of, making it Dasan's brother-in-law that Moshe had saved, not Dasan himself. Although it may not seem strange that Dasan would know what happened to his sister and brother-in-law, their telling Dasan could still constitute "loshon hara," and Moshe would not have automatically known that Dasan knew. The Yeday Moshe (another commentary on the Midrash Rabbah) also alters the text of the Midrash; rather than "Dasan" being a proper name (and the identity of the husband), the Midrash is saying that "[even] according to the laws of [non-Jews] adulterers are punishable by death." Additionally, the Yefeh To'ar (yet another commentary on the Midrash Rabbah) says that the Midrash that identifies Dasan as the man Moshe saved must be disagreeing with the Midrash that identifies Dasan as the person that protested against Moshe trying to break up the fight (and vice versa). The bottom line is that all of these sources seem to find it inconsistent to say that it was Dasan in both cases, as Moshe would have already known that Dasan knew what had happened.

However, this is not necessarily the case. The Sefornu says that when Dasan asked Moshe if he was going to kill him the same way he had killed the Egyptian, he did it in public. Therefore, even if Moshe knew that Dasan already knew what he had done, there were others who were now aware of it as well. But there could be more.

Moshe had just saved Dasan's life. He could have looked the other way, maintaining his Egyptian identity rather than risking his comfortable position to intervene on behalf of one of the Hebrew slaves. Instead, Moshe made it clear that he was on their side, and, at the very least, Dasan should have been grateful that the Prince of Egypt had saved his life. Yet, the very next day, when Moshe broke up his fight with Aviram, Dasan lashed out at him for interfering. What was

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Dasan's complaint? That Moshe was acting as "an officer and/or a judge" over his fellow Jews. Moshe saw right away that Dasan craved a position of leadership and power, which led him to resent the leadership qualities Moshe (who had just been given a prominent position by his step-father, the Pharaoh-see Rashi on 2:11) had shown by saving his life. Dasan was himself a "leader," being a "shotair" overseeing the labor of other Jews (which is why the Egyptian "nogais" went to Dasan's house and saw his wife-see Rashi). Dasan's position gave him access to Pharaoh (see 5:25), and the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:30) says that Dasan was threatening to tell him what Moshe had done to his (Dasan's) Egyptian boss. Moshe realized that Dasan was willing to say "lashon hara," to tell others what had happened the day before, so he became frightened.

And Moshe's fear was justified; Dasan (and Aviram) did tell Pharaoh that Moshe had killed an Egyptian taskmaster (Shemos Rabbah 1:31), leading Pharaoh to try to kill him. [When G-d told Moshe that it was safe to return to Egypt because "those that want you dead have died" (Shemos 4:19), He was referring to Dasan and Aviram (see Rashi), who had lost all of their wealth (and power), and no longer had the (new) Pharaoh's ear.] It is therefore not a contradiction to say that it was Dasan that Moshe saved on that first day, and Dasan whose threat (the next day) to publicize it made Moshe afraid that it would now become known.

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### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Yehoshua Shapira, Rosh Yeshivat Ramat Gan; Translated by Moshe Goldberg

In general, the name of a Torah portion is the key to its essence. This week, "Shemot" refers to "the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt" [Shemot 1:1], and we might well wonder why this is so important. At first glance, this detailed but dry list of the names at the beginning of the portion has no substantial purpose, since it is immediately followed by a description of the beginning of the slavery and the circumstances of the birth of the nation's savior. In general, the detailed description of the names of those who descended to Egypt is remarkable in itself. What does it matter if somebody is called one thing or another? Isn't the

character of a person-his essence and his actions-more important than his name?

The answer to this is that the Torah puts a strong emphasis on names. It explains in detail why each tribe was given its name, and what events were related to this choice of the name. The Almighty is directly involved in changing the names of Avraham and Sarah, and He explains the reason? "For I have made you into a father of many nations" [Bereishit 17:5]. He also gives Yitzchak his name, and according to the sages He was involved in choosing Yaacov's name. Names are so important that the first task given to Adam after he was created was to give every living creature a name. Perhaps this explains why the rabbis had a custom of giving explanations and special meanings of the names of the Torah portions.

A name represents the root, the essence, and the kernel of a personality. All the elements of traits and actions that branch out to the external personality stem from the name, and in some ways it represents an expression of the secrets within the person. This explains why the Almighty brought all the animals to Adam, as a way of sharing the act of creation with him. By giving them names, Adam became a partner in shaping the root of their essence. Parents get a taste of this unique treasure when the Divine spirit joins them and inspires them to give their newborn child a name.

Thus, the names of the seventy people who descended to Egypt includes a hint of all that lies at the roots of their lives and in what will happen to them in future generations. This is actually the very essence of the Torah portion, which was purposely not named for the suffering of slavery or the birth of Moshe, but rather for the names of Bnei Yisrael. The central element of the portion is neither the slavery nor Moshe's story. The portion is mainly involved in describing the children of Yisrael in their descent into the constricted womb of the exile in Egypt, in order to be formed into a holy nation. This is therefore the proper time to take note of the name of the new embryo, to interpret all the abundance that lies-as a genetic code-within the roots of all their names and the names of their fathers.

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

The change in eras is sudden, unexpected and unpredictable. The Jewish people have lived in Egypt for over a century in the land of Goshen in affluence and security. They are apparently very well integrated into Egyptian society and are comfortable in their future there.

And then there arises a new king, a different era of eighty years of slavery and death, persecution and torture. Where did this new king come from? How was it that no one anticipated such a scenario?

Pharaoh called for volunteers to help build and modernize the infrastructure of Egypt. The Jews as

good and super citizens of Egypt volunteered en masse. But slowly they noticed that they were the only volunteers present for the work. And eventually they came to work on the Egyptian city fortresses as slaves.

Soon the entire Jewish population was enslaved, except for the tribe of Levi. In a blink of an historical eye the Jewish population went from riches to rags, from citizens to slaves, from high society to becoming non-persons.

And the truth of the matter was that this enormous sea change in the status of the Jews in Egypt caught the Jews by surprise. They knew that Avraham had a dream about bondage and exile but they did not imagine that they were the generation that would experience its realization and that Egypt was the place where it would occur.

So, when it did occur to them and they were its victims they were completely unprepared for this new sad era. It would take the leadership of Moshe to readjust their thinking, to make them realize that their future no longer lay in living in Egypt and to yearn for redemption.

Even so our rabbis of the Midrash concluded that most of the Jews did not survive physically and spiritually to leave Egypt.

The truth is that any generation that lives at a time of great unforeseen change finds itself in a difficult situation. It becomes a generation of uncertainty longing to relive its past and seemingly powerless to deal with its present situation effectively, let alone its future.

I think that we can all agree that we are currently undergoing a great change, economically, socially and security-wise. While we may long for past situations which seemed so much more certain and secure, our task currently is to deal effectively with what is facing us now.

The example of Moshe has to be replicated to the best of our abilities. The Torah always demands that Jews behave wisely, rationally, and with great faith and belief. Moshe's task is to fulfill this ideal situation of Jewish behavior and goals.

Moshe himself traverses the long road from being raised as a prince in the house of Pharaoh to being a hunted man and eventually the messenger of destruction to that very house in which he was raised. The Torah does not record for us Moshe's personal trials and angst in adjusting to situations that were completely new to him.

But part of his greatness lies in his G-d-given ability to do so. So, as we begin the book of Shemot let us resolve to hang in there and deal with our current problems to the best of our abilities. Better days are surely on the way. © 2009 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more

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**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

She is one of the most unexpected heroes of the Hebrew Bible. Without her, Moses might not have lived. The whole story of the exodus would have been different. Yet she was not an Israelite. She had nothing to gain, and everything to lose, by her courage. Yet she seems to have had no doubt, experienced no misgivings, made no hesitation. If it was Pharaoh who afflicted the children of Israel, it was another member of his own family who saved the decisive vestige of hope: Pharaoh's daughter.

Recall the context. Pharaoh had decreed death for every male Israelite child. Yocheved, Amram's wife, had a baby boy. For three months she was able to conceal his existence, but no longer. Fearing his certain death if she kept him, she set him afloat on the Nile in a basket, hoping against hope that someone might see him and take pity on him. This is what follows:

"Pharaoh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile, while her maids walked along the Nile's edge. She saw the box in the reeds and sent her slave-girl to fetch it. Opening it, she saw the boy. The child began to cry, and she had pity on it. 'This is one of the Hebrew boys', she said."

Note the sequence. First she sees that it is a child and has pity on it. A natural, human, compassionate reaction. Only then does it dawn on her who the child must be. Who else would abandon a child? She remembers her father's decree against the Hebrews. Instantly the situation has changed. To save the baby would mean disobeying the royal command. That would be serious enough for an ordinary Egyptian; doubly so for a member of the royal family.

Nor is she alone when the event happens. Her maids are with her; her slave-girl is standing beside her. She must face the risk that one of them, in a fit of pique, or even mere gossip, will tell someone about it. Rumours flourish in royal courts. Yet she does not shift her ground. She does not tell one of her servants to take the baby and hide it with a family far away. She has the courage of her compassion. She does not flinch. Now something extraordinary happens:

"The [child's] sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the child for you?' 'Go', replied Pharaoh's daughter. The young girl went and got the child's own mother. 'Take this child and nurse it', said Pharaoh's daughter. 'I will pay you a fee.' The woman took the child and nursed it."

The simplicity with which this is narrated conceals the astonishing nature of this encounter. First, how does a child-not just a child, but a member of a persecuted people-have the audacity to address a

princess? There is no elaborate preamble-"Your royal highness" or any other formality of the kind we are familiar with elsewhere in biblical narrative. They seem to speak as equals. Equally pointed are the words left unsaid. "You know and I know", Moses' sister implies, "who this child is; it is my baby brother." She proposes a plan brilliant in its simplicity. If the real mother is able to nurse the child, we both minimise the danger. You will not have to explain to the court how this child has suddenly appeared. We will be spared the risk of bringing him up: we can say the child is not a Hebrew, and that the mother is not the mother but only a nurse. Miriam's ingenuity is matched by Pharaoh's daughter's instant agreement. She knows; she understands; she gives her consent.

Then comes the final surprise: "When the child matured, [his mother] brought him to Pharaoh's daughter. She adopted him as her own son, and named him Moses. 'I bore him from the water', she said."

Pharaoh's daughter has not simply had a moment's compassion. She has not forgotten the child. Nor has the passage of time diminished her sense of responsibility. Not only does she remain committed to his welfare; she adopts the riskiest of strategies. She will adopt it and bring him up as her own son. This is courage of a high order.

Yet the single most surprising detail comes in the last sentence. In the Torah, it is parents who gave a child its name, and in the case of a special individual, G-d himself. It is G-d who gives the name Isaac to the first Jewish child; G-d's angel who gives Jacob the name Israel; G-d who changes the names of Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah. We have already encountered one adoptive name-Tsofenat Paneakh-the name by which Joseph was known in Egypt; yet Joseph remains Joseph. How surpassingly strange that the hero of the exodus, greatest of all the prophets, should bear not the name Amram and Yocheved have undoubtedly used thus far, but the one given to him by his adoptive mother, an Egyptian princess. A midrash draws our attention to the fact: "This is the reward for those who do kindness. Although Moses had many names, the only one by which he is known in the whole Torah is the one given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. Even the Holy One, blessed be He, did not call him by any other name." (Shemot Rabbah 1: 26) Indeed Moshe-Meses-is an Egyptian name, meaning "child", as in Ramses.

Who then was Pharaoh's daughter? Nowhere is she explicitly named. However the First Book of Chronicles (4: 18) mentions a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she the sages identified as the woman who saved Moses. The name Bitya (sometimes rendered as Batya) means "the daughter of G-d". From this, the sages drew one of their most striking lessons: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: 'Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You are not

My daughter, but I shall call you My daughter.'" (Vayikra Rabbah 1: 3). They added that she was one of the few (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime (Derekh Eretz Zuta 1).

Instead of "Pharaoh's daughter" read "Hitler's daughter" or "Stalin's daughter" and we see what is at stake. Tyranny cannot destroy humanity. Moral courage can sometimes be found in the heart of darkness. That the Torah itself tells the story the way it does has enormous implications. It means that when we come to people we must never generalize, stereotype. The Egyptians were not all evil: even from Pharaoh himself a heroine was born. Nothing could signal more powerfully that the Torah is not an ethnocentric text; that we must recognise virtue wherever we find it, even among our enemies; and that the basic core of human values-humanity, compassion, courage- is truly universal. Holiness may not be; goodness is.

Outside Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, is an avenue dedicated to righteous gentiles. Pharaoh's daughter is a supreme symbol of what they did and what they were. I, for one, am profoundly moved by that encounter on the banks of the Nile between an Egyptian princess and a young Israelite child, Moses' sister Miriam. The contrast between them-in terms of age, culture, status and power-could not be greater. Yet their deep humanity bridges all the differences, all the distance. Two heroines. May they inspire us. © 2009 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

“**A**nd it happened during those many days that the King of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed from their work-burden and they cried out; and their cries went upwards unto G-d from their work-burden" (Exodus 2:23).

The Sacred Zohar presents a very strange etymology for the name of our Freedom Festival Pesah (literally, the Pascal lamb): it is derived from two separate syllables, which are themselves distinct words: pe-sah, 'a mouth which speaks.' This is why 'telling' or 'speaking' out the story is such an important part of how we celebrate the Seder of the holiday. But what exactly does a "speaking mouth" have to do with the Festival of our Freedom?

Secondly, the verse cited above describes the Israelite response to the death of the Pharaoh of the servitude: "...the king of Egypt died and the children of Israel sighed from their work-burden" (Ex 2:23). Given that the death of a king implies the death of his draconian policies, or at least a temporary respite, shouldn't the response of the Israelites be more in the form of 'rejoicing' or even 'exultation' at the death of the king rather than 'sighing' or 'groaning'?

Thirdly, the first "taker-outer" or redeemer in the Exodus account was Bitya, the daughter of Pharaoh (the one whose death would later engender "sighing"), who took baby Moses out of the bulrushes of the Nile River (The Hebrew Moshe means the one who takes out). The Bible describes her discovery of the "Hebrew baby" in a rather curious fashion: "And she opened the ark and she saw the small child and behold the lad was crying; and she said, he is from the Hebrews" (Exodus 2:6). Would it not have been much more logical for the text to have written, "And she heard the small child crying"? Cries are heard, not seen?! Furthermore, why change the noun in mid-stream from yeled (small child) to na'ar (older lad)? It would seem that the consistent use of yeled is the preferred usage. Moreover, how did she know that the baby was a Hebrew from the sound of his cries?

When I visited the former Soviet Union on a mission from the Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1970, I heard the following joke from a number of my "contacts": A visitor from America asks a 'refusenik,' "How is the Jewish education in Russia"? "I can't complain," he answers. "And how is the availability of religious articles in Russia"? "I can't complain," he says, "And how is your standard of living in Russia"? "I can't complain," he repeats. "Then why are you so anxious to leave Russia for Israel?," asks the astonished American. "Because there at least I can complain," he responds.

The Piaseczno Rebbe (known as the Eish Kodesh), a Hassidic rebbe who was a lover of Zion and who was tragically martyred in the Holocaust, explains our textual difficulties by reminding us that anti-semitic totalitarian despots often made it impossible for Jews to even cry out, to sigh in pain. During a children's round-up ("Kinder- action") when Nazi officers would make house-to-house searches for children to be sent to the extermination camps, parents would hide their babies and young children, stuffing up their mouths with rags to prevent their give-away crying; when families were escaping in the middle of the night, mother's would clamp their hands over their babies mouths for the same reason. More often than not, the babies would be found dead, suffocated by their inability to breathe! And as a result of the desperation of their situation, Hebrew tots would learn easily how to cry without emitting a sigh or a weeping sob, how to cry soundlessly so as not to call any attention to their existence whereabouts.

This is how the Eish Kodesh interprets Princess Bitya's understanding that it was a Hebrew baby she had discovered in the ark; the child had already been trained to weep soundlessly like a much older lad, so that she saw him weeping with her eyes but did not hear him weeping with her ears.

Similarly, this is the explanation for the textual reading, "... the King of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed from their work-burden..." (2:23). The servitude continued, Hebrew male babies were still cast

into the Nile, and so there was certainly no cause for rejoicing. But at least in one respect there was a leniency: at least the Hebrews could now cry out, could express their pain, without having to suffer extra punishment for their tears. Undoubtedly the greatest pain of suffering derives from a situation which even precludes the possibility of expressing one's hurt, of sighing in distress.

The Midrash teaches that when Adam was sent into exile from Eden, the Almighty granted him two gifts which would ease his pain: the Sabbath day, and the tear that falls from the eye. In the Sabbath there will always be the hope and the promise of ultimate redemption, and the tears that we shed do bring momentary relief. Thus the Sacred Zohar teaches that we begin our celebration of freedom - the paradigm for our ultimate redemption - by speaking out with our mouths (pe-sah). No matter how deep our suffering has penetrated, no matter how often our mouths have been stuffed with rags not allowing even a momentary sigh, on this night, the night of pe-sah, we relive that very first leniency that was expressed in our 'sighing,' and which eventually culminated in our eventual Exodus from Egypt. And, of course, true freedom means the possibility to express ourselves freely, to agree and even disagree, to praise and to complain, openly and without fear. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### COUNCIL OF YOUNG ISRAEL RABBIS IN ISRAEL

## Divrei Torah Bulletin

by Rabbi Avraham Avnit

**P**arashat Shemot is the very first sedra in the second of the five books of the Torah. The word Shemot, which means "names", is derived and taken from the very first verse, as it is written, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came out of Egypt, with Yaakov, each man and his household came" (Exodus 1:1). Rashi, citing the Midrash Tanchumah, explains that the names of the tribal ancestors had been mentioned in their lifetimes and they are repeated here as they pass from the scene. They are likened to the stars, which Hashem brings forth by number and by name (Isaiah 40:26). He counts and enumerates them when they come out and again when they are "gathered in". This shows that the forefathers, like the stars, are precious to Hashem.

Still, we wonder why the second book of the Torah is called Shemot. The Exodus from Egypt is the dominant theme, not names. Furthermore, what is the significance of a name that a whole sefer should be called by it? The Talmud (Berachot 7b) reads an interesting implication into names. On the verse: "Come, behold the works of Hashem, who has made desolations in the earth" (Psalms 46:9), the Talmud declares, "Read not desolations (Shamot) but names (Shemot)". This is used by the Talmud to indicate the

potency of names in individual destiny. Moreover, the desolations represent the "destruction" and Shemot (names) represent the "construction". The Exodus occurred once in Jewish history, and belongs in the past. The giving of names, on the other hand, is meant for the future.

Moshe Rabbeinu said to Hashem, "Behold, when I come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The G-d of your forefathers has sent me to you,' and they say to me, 'What is His Name?'-What shall I say to them?" Hashem answered Moshe, "I Am That I Am (I Shall Be As I Shall Be)." And He said: "So shall you say to the children of Israel, 'I Am (I Shall Be) has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:13-14). Rashi explains Hashem's Name. "I will be with them in this suffering as I will be with them in their future subjugation under other kingdoms." Then Moshe said to Him, "G-d of the Universe! Why should I mention to them other sufferings? They have enough with this suffering." Hashem replied to him, "You have spoken rightly, tell them the short version-

"I Am (or I Shall Be) only." The Ramban interprets Hashem's Name by saying that Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu the Name which fully teaches His existence and His providence. Hashem responded with a name that indicates that "whenever they need Me, they can call upon Me. I will be with them in all their afflictions."

Rabbi Yaakov Baal Ha'Turim questions the unusual beginning of the Book of Shemot. It starts with the word and these (Ve'eh'leh Normally, when there is a conjunctive "and" (vav Ha'Chibur), the verse is a continuation of the last part or written segment. At the very end of Sefer Bereishit, we find the story of the death of Yoseph Ha'Tzadik. Before his death, he instructed and told his brothers to keep their Hebrew Names, and not to change them. By keeping their original Hebrew Names, says the Baal Ha'Turim, the Israelites merited to be redeemed and liberated from the servitude of Egypt. The Baal Ha'Turim notes further that the first verse starts with the letter VAV and ends with the letter VAV. In gimatriya, the numerical value of the two Hebrew letters is twelve, corresponding to the twelve tribes. In this same verse, the Baal Ha'Turim finds a reference to Shabbat and Milah, two mitzvot that served as demarcations of merit for the Bnei Yisrael. Every Hebrew name given to a Jewish boy and girl is given in the presence of a minyan (quorum), and has a profound meaning to the child, whether or not the parents thought of the importance of the name.

There are three partners in creating us, our parents and Hashem. When the parents choose a name, G-d gives His approval and blessings for their right choice. The Hebrew names are pillars of hope, leading the children to a good future. The Hebrew name becomes a holy word and no one is allowed to delete or erase that name, as if erasing the name

shortens the life and negatively alters the fate of a person. Therefore, in case of illness or sickness, we add a name in a proper manner.

The example pertaining to the Father of our Nation, Avraham Avinu, emphasizes the profound significance of a name. "...Hashem spoke with him saying, "As for Me, this is My covenant with you: You shall be a father of a multitude of nations; your name shall no longer be called Avram, but your name shall be Avraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations; I will make you exceedingly fruitful, I will make nations of you, and kings shall descend from you" (Genesis 17:3-6). Hashem blessed Avraham and promised him a great future, following the giving of his new name. The name Avraham has an enormous impact on our long history. The Torah gives us a hint that Hashem created the world specifically for the sake of Avraham. "He created them male and female. He blessed them and called their name Man on the day they were created (Hee'bah'reh'am) (Bereishit 5:2). The letters of the word "Hee'bah'reh'am" rearranged spell "Avraham." Also, his wife Sarah Imeinu had her name changed from Sarai to Sarah, which means rulership and dominion, as she represented herself accordingly.

"Rabbi Shimon said: There are three crowns- the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of kingship; but the crown of a good name surpasses them all" (Pirkei Avot, 4:17).

May we merit obtaining good names for our endeavors and efforts. © 2009 Rabbi A. Avnit and CYIR

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**W**hy, out of all places, did G-d 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 G-d's ultimate revelation to the entire Jewish people. Note the similarity in sound between sneh and Sinai, the mountain where G-d 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 G-d. As long as Jews were enslaved, G-d could only reveal Himself in the lowly burning bush in the spirit of "I am with my people in their pain." G-d cannot be in comfort as long as His people are in distress. (Rashi quoting Tanhuma 14)

And we, created in G-d'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 G-d feels our anguish, so too should we feel the anguish of others. Only when feeling the pain will we, as G-d 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 Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Simply Qualified**

**A**s the book of Exodus begins, it is important to ponder what catapulted Moshe (Moses) from the position of valiant citizen to national leader. The story of Moshe's youth in Egypt is hardly expounded upon in the Torah. Yes, it tells the story of his birth and his escape in the Nile River. The Torah even mentions his great vigilance in smiting an Egyptian who struck a Hebrew. But in relating those stories, it does not leave us feeling that those acts, merited Divine ordination. It tells the tale of Moshe stopping a fight between two Hebrew fellows, and how he was forced to flee from Egypt to the wilderness of Midian because of his strong stand in chastising those Jews who quarreled. All those stories show perseverance, courage, and fortitude. Yet not one of those incidents is juxtaposed with the Divine revelation that catapults Moshe into the great spiritual and prophetic leader whom we know.

Even after the event in which he saves Yisro's (Jethro) seven daughters from evil shepherds G-d is silent, there is no pronouncement of Moses' glory or appointment of a Divine role. Hashem declares Moshe's greatness in the context of a very simple serene story.

"Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro his father-in-law, he guided them into the wilderness, and he arrived at the mountain of G-d toward Horeb.

An angel of G-d appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amidst the bush, and he saw that the bush was burning, and the bush was not consumed. Moshe looked and analyzed the sight and he questioned, "why is the bush not being burned?" (Exodus 3:1-3). It is only in that serene setting that G-d called out "Moshe, Moshe," to which Moshe replied "Here I am." The end of that story is the beginning of the Jewish nation.

Why is the act of shepherding sheep the setting for such majestic and Divine revelation? What amazing incident occurred during the shepherding? Why didn't G-d appear to Moses after his courageous act of smiting the Egyptian or after he reproached two Hebrews who were fighting? Wouldn't that setting be the ripe moment for induction into the halls of prophecy and leadership?

James Humes, a speechwriter for President Reagan, tells the story about a young recruit who was drafted into the army. During the interview, the sergeant asked him the following question, "Did you have six years of grade school education?"

"Sure thing, Sir", snapped the recruit. "I also graduated with honors from high school. I went to Yale where I received my college degree and then I did my graduate work at Colombia University, and," he added, "I received my doctorate in political science at Harvard."

The sergeant turned toward to the stenographer, smiled, and said, "Put a check in the space marked literate."

The Midrash tells us that during Moshe's tenure as a shepherd, one of the sheep ran away. He chased the sheep, he brought it back to the rest of the flock, and he carried it home. G-d looked upon him and said, "A man who cares for his sheep, will care for his people." That act catapulted Moshe to the position we know.

Acts that are bold and courageous may personify leadership, character, and commitment. People think that they that only those gallant and daring acts that will catapult them into greatness and glory. The Torah tells us that it is not so.

The Torah links Moshe's selection to Divine leadership with the simple task of shepherding. The qualifications that G-d wants are not necessarily what humans perceive. We often look for honors, accolades, achievements, and accomplishments that are almost superhuman. Hashem, on the other hand, cherishes simple shepherding, He loves care and concern for simple Jews. We may come to Him with risumis of brilliance, of courage, of valor, but He does not need that. He wants consistency, love, compassion, and, perhaps most of all, humble simplicity.

Moshe had those qualities too. It was those qualities of compassion, not the forceful qualities of attacking the Egyptian taskmaster, nor fending off evil shepherds, nor chastising combative Hebrews, that

were chosen to cast Moshe into the light of leadership. We may be bold and courageous, but without compassion for the little things, without the humility to find lost sheep, we may be simply overqualified. © 1998 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com

### RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

**K**ing Shlomo writes in Mishlei (24:5), "The wise man ('gever') remains steadfast, and the man of knowledge grows stronger." Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain;

1180-1263) writes: It is well known that the three major characteristics for which people are praised in this world are: wisdom, strength (gevurah), and wealth. Wisdom is the most secure of these, for it resides within a person's soul. Moreover, one's wisdom generally increases with age. Strength is next, for it resides within a person's body. However, as a person grows older, his strength generally lessens. Wealth is the least secure, for it is external.

Nevertheless, writes Rabbeinu Yonah, strength and wealth actually are derivatives of wisdom. Thus King Shlomo writes in the verses that precede ours (24:3-4), "Through wisdom a house is built... and through knowledge, its chambers become filled with all dear and pleasant treasures." And, he writes in the verse that follows ours (24:6), "Through wise strategies, you can wage war..."

The verse with which we opened can be applied to Moshe Rabbeinu, writes Rabbeinu Yonah. Moshe was the wisest of all men, and he demonstrated steadfastness and strength against Pharaoh. Through Moshe, Hashem's strength was demonstrated to the world. However, Moshe used his wisdom and strength to help the oppressed even before Hashem appointed him to be His agent, as related in our parashah (see, for example, 2:12 and 2:17). These events are what led to Moshe's appointment as the savior of Bnei Yisrael, in keeping with our verse, "The man of knowledge grows stronger [i.e., more powerful]." (Drashot U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah al Ha'Torah)

"And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt; with Yaakov..." (Shmot 1:1)

Why does the pasuk begin with "Yisrael" and continue with "Yaakov"? R' Yoel Herzog z"l (Paris, France; early 20th century; father of Israeli Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Halevi Herzog z"l) explains based on the similar wording in the verse in Parashat Vayigash which describes Yaakov's descent to Egypt. There we read (Bereishit 46:8), "Now these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt-Yaakov and his children." We also read there (verse 2): "G-d spoke to Yisrael in a night vision and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov.'" Why the change from Yisrael to Yaakov?

The answer is that "Yisrael," the name given to our Patriarch after he defeated Esav's guardian angel, represents the fulfillment of Yitzchak's blessing that his son would rule over the other nations. When Yisrael/Yaakov was descending to Egypt, where his son was the viceroy to Pharaoh, our Patriarch and his children thought that he was going as "Yisrael." But Hashem appeared to him in a dream and informed him that this was not the case. Rather, Hashem told him, his journey was the beginning of the exile that had been foretold to Avraham. Therefore, He called the Patriarch "Yaakov."

Perhaps Yaakov did not immediately tell his children about his dream. Therefore, they continued to believe that they were going to Egypt as the "Children of Yisrael." However, they went not with Yisrael, but with Yaakov. (Imrei Yoel)

"He [Moshe] turned this way and that and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." (2:12)

"The shepherds came and drove them [the daughters of Yitro] away; Moshe got up and saved them, and watered their sheep." (2:17)

We read in Bemidbar (12:3), "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth." How are Moshe's actions in the above verses from our parashah and other events in the Torah (e.g., smashing the luchot) consistent with his trait of humility?

R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir and Ponovezh yeshivot; died 1974) explains that we are wrong to equate humility with timidity and weakness. A humble person is humble because his awe of G-d leads him to recognize his inadequacy vis-a-vis the Creator. As a corollary, a humble person fears only G-d, and not man. (Quoted in Le'anavim Yitain Chen p.125)

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (the Alter of Novardok; died 1920) describes humility as follows: A humble person does not think that he has no positive traits. However, he is so disturbed by whatever negative traits he has that he has no time to think about his positive traits. To what may this be compared? To a small cut on one's finger (for example, a paper cut), which causes pain disproportionate to its size. (Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar Tikkun Ha'midot ch.4)

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