

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**E**very son that is born shall be thrown into the river” (Shemos 1:22). Paro (Pharaoh) went to extraordinary lengths to prevent a savior from living long enough to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt. First he tried to get the midwives to kill any males even before they were born (1:15-17). When that didn't work, he had them thrown into the Nile after they were born. As always, G-d had the last laugh, and the savior Paro wanted so desperately to kill ended up being raised right under his own nose, in his palace, by his daughter. How could Paro not have realized that the little boy saved from the water might be the very child he wanted to eliminate?

Aside from the fact that the name Paro's daughter gave the baby, Moshe, indicated that she had drawn him from the water (2:10), and that he had been born on the very day the Egyptian astrologers had predicted the savior would be born (see Rashi on 1:22), Paro also had Egyptian babies thrown into the Nile because the astrologers were unsure whether the savior would be born to an Israelite woman or to an Egyptian woman (ibid). The reason they were unsure is because Moshe was born to an Israelite and raised by an Egyptian, and anyone that raises a child is considered a parent (see Kli Yakar). Yet, Paro allows his daughter to raise this adopted son. What was he thinking?

After Moshe was put into the water by his mother (2:3), the decree to have babies thrown into the Nile ceased (Sotah 12b). The Talmud (ibid) explains why it ceased: "They saw that Israel's savior would be smitten by water, [so] they decreed that 'every son that is born shall be thrown into the river;' once Moshe was thrown in (i.e. put in the water in a basket by his mother), they said, 'we don't see that [astrological] sign anymore,' [so] they abolished their decree - not knowing that it was because of the 'waters of Merivah' (when Moshe hit the rock to bring out its waters instead of talking to it) that he was smitten." However, since the cause of the astrological sign (Moshe being punished for hitting the rock) hadn't occurred yet, and would still occur, why did that "sign" disappear? The Egyptian astrologers should still have seen the "sign" that he would be smitten by water, and kept the decree intact! [If the "sign" was fluid, and could be fulfilled in multiple

ways - including by Moshe drowning as an infant (see Eitz Yosef), then the Egyptians not knowing what the sign really indicated is irrelevant.]

The wording in the Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:24) is "since Moshe was put into the water, they said, 'their savior has already been tossed into the water,' [and] immediately abolished the decree." The astrologers might have seen a different sign indicating that he had been thrown into the water, and based on that assumed everything was taken care of. However, they should have still seen the original sign, since that future "smiting" was still going to happen. Additionally, once Moshe was removed from the water, the sign that he had already been "smitten" should have disappeared. Why didn't the astrologers notice that the original sign was still there and that the "new" sign, that he had already been smitten, was no longer there?

This is especially true since a circumstance arose where they should have wanted to recheck the astrological signs. When Moshe was a child, he took the crown off of Paro's head and put it on his own head (Shemos Rabbah 1:26). Even though this didn't concern Paro, it concerned his advisors, who thought it showed that Moshe wanted to take over the kingdom. They therefore suggested a test to see if little Moshe really knew what he was doing, or was just reaching for something that glowed and was shiny. They brought out a bowl containing gold and a burning red-hot coal to see if he would reach for both shiny, glowing things, or just for the gold. As Moshe was reaching for the gold, the angel Gavriel pushed his hand onto the coal, and then put it into his mouth, burning his tongue. Thanks to Gavriel, Moshe "passed" the test, but before conducting the test, why didn't they just check the astrological signs to see if there was still a savior out there, and whether he was still "smitten" by water? It would seem, then, that the astrologers did originally see that the Israelite savior had been "smitten" by water while he was still in the water (as the Midrash indicates), and no longer saw the original "sign," even when they checked again afterwards (as the Talmud indicates). The question remains, though, why didn't they see the original "sign," since Moshe being "smitten" by the waters of Merivah was still going to happen?

When Moshe and Aharon first went to Paro to tell him to send the Children of Israel out of Egypt to serve G-d (5:1), Paro responded (5:2) by saying he had never heard of Him. This is understood to mean that Paro never heard the name that Moshe and Aharon

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referred to G-d by (Y-H-V-H), not that he had never heard of G-d. This name refers to G-d's ability to override the laws of nature (see Ramban on 6:3) - laws that He created and usually runs the world with - including the ability to change things "written in the stars." Just as G-d "took [Avraham] outside the stars" (see Shabbos 156a), so that even though his astrological signs indicated that he couldn't become a father, G-d overrode his "nature" so that he could, G-d does the same for others when it is warranted. This ability to trump nature was unknown to Paro, and it took ten harsh plagues to get him to believe/accept it.

The Talmud (Sotah 12b), shortly after telling us about the mistake of the Egyptian astrologers regarding Moshe, tells us that while he was still in the water (in the basket), G-d's administering angels pleaded with G-d to save baby Moshe. Moshe was placed in the water either on the 21st of Nisan, the date the Sea of Reeds would be split 80 years later, or on the 6th of Sivan, the date the Torah was given. "The administering angels said to G-d, 'Master Of The Universe, shall the one who would sing Your praises by the sea on this day be smitten on this day?' Or, alternatively, 'shall the one who would accept the Torah on Mt. Sinai on this day be smitten on this day?'" G-d answered the angels, and the daughter of Paro miraculously saved Moshe (with her outstretched arm). Had G-d not intervened, Moshe would have drowned, just as Paro and his astrologers had hoped. G-d once again trumped nature, and allowed the savior of Israel to survive.

When G-d overrides the "ma'areches hashamayim," the celestial bodies, and doesn't allow the future that the astrological signs predicted to become the present, what happens to those signs? Are they still there but unable to affect us, or do they change as G-d changes the reality? If, when G-d goes "outside the stars," the signs given by those stars change too, we can understand why Moshe's astrological signs changed after G-d saved him from drowning as an infant.

The astrologers saw a sign that indicated that the savior of the Children of Israel would be done in by water, and this was true, because of Moshe hitting the rock. (Which would mean that in order to "pass" the test Moshe would have had to go beyond his nature, i.e. becoming a leader that can lead even after they enter Israel and would no longer live through outright

miracles, see Netziv on Bamidbar 20:8.) The astrologers thought that the sign meant he would drown, and tried working within the laws of nature to cause him to drown years earlier, before he could become a savior. Moshe would have drowned, thus erasing whatever future he would have had, and when G-d saved him by overriding nature, those astrological signs were no longer there, since Moshe was taken "above the stars." Even though some aspects of his future remained intact, such as his future test by Merivah, they were no longer "in the stars," and the astrologers "no longer saw that sign." They therefore thought that their plan had worked, that the baby who would have grown up to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt had drowned, even though it only meant that his future was no longer the one that could be predicted through astrology.

When Paro was told that the astrological sign had changed, he was also convinced that they had succeeded; so much so that even when his daughter brought home a Hebrew infant saved from the river, he didn't consider the possibility that it was the baby they had tried so hard to eliminate. After all, Paro didn't accept the notion that G-d could trump nature, so there was no way for the savior to have survived. Even when his advisors thought that perhaps this crown-snatching child might be that infant who had somehow survived, Paro dismissed it, but allowed them to calm their own fears. Paro himself, though, was confident that the infant couldn't have survived, at least until he was told what Moshe had done to the Egyptian, and possibly from where (and whom) he had actually come. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Despite being set in the midst of a corrupt Egyptian society, the Jewish community was flourishing with schools, synagogues and social networks, and assimilation was virtually non-existent, and it was because they made a pact amongst themselves not to change their names, style of dress, or language. With these safeguards, they were able to keep a healthy distance. As Rabbi Shraga Simmons explains, at the beginning of this week's Parsha, Shemot, the tide turned: Immediately after the old generation died, the Jewish People spread throughout Egypt and the assimilation began. They dropped their Jewish customs and blended into secular society. Immediately, verse 8 reports the rise of anti-Semitism in Egypt. What makes this so unusual is that hatred of one group for another is typically due to what sociologists call "dislike of the unlike." The Egyptians didn't mind as long as the Jews kept to themselves. It was once they began to resemble "regular Egyptians" that the anti-Semitism began. The dual loyalty issue had reared its ugly head. Anti-Semitism is often generated with the perception that Jews have power and influence.

It's happening again today and, as we can see from this week's Parsha, the consequences are devastating. Jews are apathetic and disinterested. But if you're reading this, you are amongst those who care. We can break the cycle and turn our ship around by making the commitment to Jewish education and Jewish observance. The Torah offers literally thousands of opportunities to express our Jewish identity on a regular basis. Light Shabbos candles, or say the Shema. Listen in your Jewish studies classes, or start a lunchtime study group. Judaism is not all-or-nothing. The options are endless. The experience is transforming. The reward is eternal. ©2009 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.” (Ex 1:8) Reading the Biblical Book of Genesis, we explored and analyzed what made each of our ancestors worthy of the birthright and leadership of the Jewish people. Turning to the Book of Exodus, we now ask whether these conditions applied to the greatest prophet and leader of the Jewish people, our teacher Moses.

The first and most essential condition of leadership is the characteristic of tzedek, or more correctly tzedakah: as G-d says explaining the election of Abraham to be the bearer of the covenant: "Since I have known [loved, chosen] him in order that he may command his progeny and his household after him to guard the way of the Lord and to act in compassionate justice and morality..." (Genesis 18:19). Tzedek is justice; tzedakah is compassionate justice, i.e. justice co-mingled with love. (Deuteronomy 24:13)

The second condition for birthright eligibility is a sense of responsibility to the Abrahamic family. The bearer of the birthright must have a profound sense of loyalty to past generations, loving concern for the entire family and a deep commitment to transmitting our covenantal values and lifestyle to succeeding generations, "in order that he may command his progeny and his household after him." Preserving the family physically and spiritually against attack and assimilation also requires securing the homeland for successive generations.

When we analyze the towering personalities of the Bible through the prism of these criteria, we can recognize the outstanding qualities of Moses that enabled him to be elevated to become the master prophet of the Lord, the supreme transmitter of the content of the birthright in the form of G-d's Torah to His firstborn child, Israel.

Joseph, although brilliant and charismatic, creates tension when he brings evil reports about his siblings to his father (Gen 37:2). Furthermore, he does not "reach out" to his brothers with sensitive concern

when he acts as "the shepherd towards his brothers among the sheep" (ibid), and seeks to lord over them through his dreams of majesty and cosmic subjugation. Finally, although we can understand his lack of communication with his father and family when he is a slave and prisoner in Egypt, when as the Grand Vizier of Egypt he confronts his siblings seeking food, his harshness is more troublesome.

The other major contender for the birthright was Judah. When Tamar misleads him by playing harlot, he still has no problem in declaring that, "She is more righteous than I" (38:26). In so saying, he emerges the model of consummate righteous compassion.

Judah also unifies the entire family by taking responsibility for the fate of his younger brother, first before his father, "I myself will be a responsible co-signer for him; you can demand him from my own hand... if I don't bring him back I shall have sinned before you for all eternity" (43:9), then before the Grand Vizier, when he asks to be a substitute slave for Benjamin (Gen 44:33), and finally in leading the Grand Vizier to reveal himself, so that Joseph accepts responsibility for his father and brothers (Gen 44:18-34).

Unlike Joseph, who is born in the ancestral home of Israel and dreams of Egypt, the foreign land to which he devotes all of his energies, Moses is born in Egypt, but expends all of his energies in taking the Israelites out of that country to bring them home to their familial land. Moses is the consummate fighter for justice (tzedek) and for morality (mishpat), risking his life to struggle against injustice wherever it rears its ugly head.

The Bible introduces Moses by recording three incidents from his early life, even before telling us of his Divine election to lead the Jewish people (Exodus 3). First, he sees an Egyptian taskmaster smiting a Hebrew, and he slays the Egyptian; then he breaks up the fight between two Hebrews, chastising the instigator; and finally, he rescues the daughters of the Priest of Midian from assault by the Midianite shepherds (Exodus 2:11-17). Moses is chosen to break the Egyptian tyranny because he fights against injustice perpetrated by Egyptian against Hebrew, by Hebrew against Hebrew, and by Midianite against Midianite.

Whereas young Joseph tried to lord over his brothers, and they responded by rejecting him and even attempting to kill him, Moses reacts very differently to his family. Although he was brought up in the palace of Pharaoh, away from his people, Moses disregards the loss of status and ultimate the exile that will result from his brotherly concern and shows consummate concern for his people. "It happened in those days, that Moses grew up, and he went out to his brothers when he saw their suffering; he saw an Egyptian taskmaster slaying a Hebrew person from among his brothers... and he slew the Egyptian" (Ex 2:11,12).

Our final contrast: Joseph as Grand Vizier in Egypt, tries mightily to forget his father and his siblings,

naming his first son Menashe, "because G-d has made me forget (nasheh) all my troubles and my father's household" (Gen 41:51). Even Judah "left his brothers..." and married the daughter of a Canaanite (Gen 38:1, 2), rejecting family and the paternal, ancestral tradition.

The very name Moses, however, means "son" in Egyptian (Ra Mses, son of the sun-G-d); despite personal discomfort and derision by his Hebrew brothers for having assumed a leadership position - "Who made you our prince and judge? ... Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14) - Moses remains dedicated to his family, risking life and limb in order to rescue his enslaved brothers from their murderous Egyptian captors. His heart was never in Egypt: "And she [Moses' wife Zipporah] gave birth to a son, and he [Moses] called his name Gershom, because he said 'I was a stranger in a strange land'" (Exodus 2:22).

Moses shows his beleaguered family unconditional compassion and love, despite their ongoing ingratitude and abuse. "Isn't it enough that you brought us out of a land flowing with milk and honey [Egypt] just to kill us in the desert; will you also rule, yes, rule over us?" (Numbers 16:13), is reminiscent of the charge of Joseph's brothers: "Do you want to be king, yes king, over us, to rule, yes rule, against us?" (Genesis 37:8).

Moses is introduced to us at the beginning of our Biblical portion as a proud son of Levi and he never falters in this identity (Ex 1:1). He keeps his eye on his goal of transmitting G-d's message of compassionate righteousness and morality, to the progeny of Israel for all eternity in the form of our Holy Bible. © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SIR 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-Moses-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 and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Putting Passion on a Mantle

In this week's Torah portion, Moshe is charged by the Almighty with the responsibility to get the Children of Israel out of Egypt and lead them to the Promised Land. Moshe tried every which way, to absolve himself of the charge. He insists he is not the right man to talk to Pharaoh. He worried that the people will not believe him. He claims that he has trouble speaking. The Ribbono Shel Olam, Master of the Universe, does not take no for an answer. As a last resort, Moshe beseeches his Creator: "Send the one who is usually sent" (Exodus 4:13). Moshe was referring to his older brother Ahron, who preceded him as the prophet and representative of the Children of Israel. Moshe protested his own selection, intoning that even if he indeed was worthy, his appointment would upset his older brother.

But the Master of all thought and emotion knew better. "The wrath of Hashem burned against Moshe and He said, 'Ahron your brother, the Levi? I know that he will surely speak; moreover, behold, he is going out to meet you and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart'" (ibidv.14).

Not only would Ahron not bear hard feelings towards Moshe, he'd rejoice in his heart. In the Midrash on the Book of Rus, Rabbi Yitzchak Bar Merion adds a fascinating insight that begs explanation: "If Ahron had only known that the Torah would write that 'he will greet you and rejoice in his heart', then Ahron would not just have greeted Moshe with heartfelt joy, he would have gone to meet him with drums and dancing."

It's not the first time in the Torah where Rabbi Yitzchak comments on intention. In Genesis, Reuvain persuades his brothers not to kill their brother Yosef rather they should put him in a pit. The Torah elucidates his true intent, "Reuvain said to them, 'Do not commit bloodshed. Throw him into this pit which is in the wilderness, and do not lay a hand on him.' [His intent was] to rescue him from their hands, to bring him back to his father." (Genesis 37:22). Rabbi Yitzchak comments: "If Reuvain had known that the Torah was going to write that his true intent was to save Yosef from the hands of his brothers and return him to his father, [he would not have had him put in a pit] rather he would have put Yosef on his shoulders and brought him to his father."

I don't understand. What does Rabbi Yitzchak mean? Was Ahron a seeker of fortune or fame? "If he knew that the paparazzi (I'havdil) would have broadcast his joy, is it possible to say that only then he would have greeted Moshe with pomp and circumstance? Is fame the defining factor? If Moshe was worthy of greeting with a band and entourage then what difference does it make whether or not the Torah revealed Ahron's true joy upon his younger brother Moshe's elevation to power? Should it make a difference to Reuvain whether or not the Torah would reveal his true intentions? Indeed sending Yosef into a pit was really a ploy. His intent was to come back and free him. Why if he had known that the Torah would write it would he have had the conviction to defy his brothers and carry Yosef home on his shoulders? I was bothered by this Medrash for many years until I saw an anecdote. In no way do I compare the personae to the great forebears of our nation, but I learned something from the attitude that I think may explain the words of Rabbi Yitzchak Bar Merion.

By all accounts, New York Yankee, Mickey Mantle was an epic baseball player. In his eighteen years as a player, he won three American League MVP titles, played in 16 All-Star games, won a pennant twelve times and won seven World Series. He holds records for most World Series home runs (18), RBIs (40), runs (42), walks (43), extra-base hits (26), and total bases (123). He is also the career leader in walk-off home runs. I guess you could say that he was pretty good at what he was paid to do. After he retired in 1968, the press made a big commotion about a player who hit 40 home runs and had 40 stolen bases in one season. It was considered a tremendous feat as players who possess the power to hit 40 home runs usually do not have nearly the speed needed to steal 40 bases, and vice versa.

Reading accolades about the accomplishment, Mantle is alleged to have said, "[Shucks!] If I would have known that it is such a big deal, I would have done it a bunch of times myself!" According to some sources, Mr. Mantle did not use the word "Shucks".

There are certain acts in life that we think are natural and meaningless. We make light of these behaviors because we do not realize the greatness of the act. Ahron thought it was natural to greet a younger brother's rise to power with joy and did not realize how great an act it was considered in the eyes of the Almighty. Oh! Had he only known, how important such joy is, even if it was "the natural" thing to do for him! He would have embellished his expression with trumpets and a marching band! A friend once told me that he knew of a certain professional who had a child that was ill. Once a week my friend would scribble a cheerful note on a scrap of paper and leave it in the office of this man. My friend was by no means a skilled counselor and the notes were just a means of saying, I am thinking about you. When one week he received a giant

bouquet from the family thanking him for the tremendous support, my friend felt sick. He told me, "A bouquet of flowers-just for scribbled notes. If I knew it meant so much to them, I would have taken the time to neatly write an entire paragraph on a proper piece of stationery!"

A warm smile, a cheerful greeting, a joyous welcome may come natural to us. But if we only knew the wonderful ramifications of what often comes to us naturally, we would not perform with reticence or reserve, rather we would proudly place our fervor-on a mantle. © 2009 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Shifra and Puah give Jewish children life in this week's parsha. Midrash and Rashi point out that Shifra and Puah were really Yocheved and Miriam. In G-d's world where everything eventually evens out, Moshe, Yocheved's son and Miriam's brother will be saved from the Nile and its tides and crocodiles by another woman who saved children, Batya, the daughter of the Pharaoh. There is a common streak that runs throughout the Torah that goodness begets goodness and evil always will lead to other evil.

Saving children is the prime value in Jewish life. The emphasis on education in Jewish life is part of this mission of salvation of the young. The enemies of the Jewish people have always concentrated on destroying Jewish children so that the Jewish future would be bleak and non-existent. Pharaoh's decree to cast Jewish children into the Nile was the first in a long line of such decrees.

The Germans and their evil cohorts destroyed one and a half million Jewish children during the Holocaust. The absence of these children from the midst of the Jewish world is felt even today, seventy years later. Thus the supreme act of kindness and risk taken by Shifra and Puah leads to their reward that the savior of Israel will also be saved from the Nile by a different, compassionate and risk taking woman.

One never realizes how a kindness and good deed done to others can influence for good one's own life and family circle. By saving other children, Shifra and Puah saved their own little child and brother as well.

In the late 1940's the Day School movement in America was barely on its fledgling feet attempting to somehow save thousands of American Jewish children from the pits of complete assimilation and Jewish apathy and ignorance-the Nile River of its day, spiritually speaking. It faced overwhelming problems and fierce opposition from within the established Jewish community itself.

Many felt then that somehow being intensely and proudly Jewish in a knowledgeable fashion was un-American. One of the major problems that the Day

Schools faced was finding dedicated young families willing to leave the imagined sanctuary of the New York area to become the teachers and administrators of these new schools in the hinterlands of America. They were justifiably concerned about the future of their children growing up in a more difficult, Jewishly speaking, environment.

Rabbi Ahron Kotler, one of the driving forces behind the creation of these new day schools, boldly announced to the yeshiva world that any young couples who would move to these "out of town" communities to help build and staff these schools would be personally guaranteed by him to have success in raising their children as they wish.

His guarantee and prediction was fulfilled in dozens of families who have made a great deal of difference in rebuilding Torah life in America. Saving others in essence, and in the long run, helps to save one's own self. The redemption of Israel from Egyptian bondage is initiated by small acts of kindness, sacrifice and goodness. Israel and Zion is redeemed by acts of justice and righteousness. © 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why, 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 tragedies around the world, 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. © 2009 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 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. © 2009 Rabbi S. Siegel & torah.org

