

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

This week's parsha could be entitled "The birth of a leader." We see Moses, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, growing up as a prince of Egypt. We see him as a young man, for the first time realising the implications of his true identity. He is, and knows he is, a member of an enslaved and suffering people: "Growing up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people" (Ex. 2: 10).

He intervenes. He acts: the mark of a true leader. We see him intervene three times, twice in Egypt, once in Midian, to rescue victims of violence. We then witness the great scene at the burning bush where G-d summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until G-d becomes angry

and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the childhood of a hero.

But this is only the surface. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another and far more remarkable story, not about a hero but about six heroines, six courageous women without whom there would not have been a Moses.

First is Jocheved, wife of Amram and mother of the three people who were to become the great leaders of the Israelites: Miriam, Aaron and Moses himself. It was Yocheved who, at the height of Egyptian persecution, had the courage to have a child, hide him for three months, and then devise a plan to give him a chance of being rescued. We know all too little of Yocheved. In her first appearance in the Torah she is unnamed. Yet, reading the narrative, we are left in no doubt about her bravery and resourcefulness. Not by accident did her children all become leaders.

The second was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter and Moses' elder sister. It was she who kept watch over the child as the ark floated down the river, and who approached Pharaoh's daughter with the suggestion that he be nursed among his own people. The biblical text paints a portrait of the young Miriam as a figure of unusual fearlessness and presence of mind. Rabbinic tradition went further. In a remarkable midrash, we read of how the young Miriam confronted her father Amram and persuaded him to change his mind. Hearing of the decree that every male Israelite baby would be drowned in the river, Amram led the Israelites in divorcing their wives so that there would be no more children. He had logic on his side. Could it be right to bring children into the world if there were a fifty per cent chance that they would be killed at birth? Yet Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him. "Your decree," she said, "is worse than Pharaoh's. His affects only the boys; yours affects all. His deprives children of life in this world; yours will deprive them of life even in the world to come." Amram relented, and as a result, Moses was born.¹ The implication is clear: Miriam had more faith than her father.

Third and fourth were the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who frustrated Pharaoh's first attempt at genocide. Told to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared G-d and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1: 17).



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¹ Shemot Rabbah 1: 13

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Summoned and accused of disobedience, they outwitted Pharaoh by constructing an ingenious cover story: the Hebrew women, they said, are vigorous and give birth before we arrive. They escaped punishment and saved lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilization: the idea that there are moral limits to power. There are instructions that should not be obeyed. There are crimes against humanity that cannot be excused by the claim that "I was only obeying orders." This concept, generally known as "civil disobedience," is usually attributed to the nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau, and entered international consciousness after the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. Its true origin, though, lay thousands of years earlier in the actions of two women, Shifra and Puah. Through their understated courage they earned a high place among the moral heroes of history, teaching us the primacy of conscience over conformity, the law of justice over the law of the land.²

The fifth is Zipporah, Moses' wife. The daughter of a Midianite priest, she was nonetheless determined to accompany Moses on his mission to Egypt, despite the fact that she had no reason to risk her life on such a hazardous venture. In a deeply enigmatic passage, it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4: 24-26). The impression we have of her is of a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, has a better sense than Moses himself of what G-d requires.

I have saved until last the most intriguing of them all: Pharaoh's daughter. It was she who had the courage to rescue an Israelite child and bring it up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people. Could we imagine a daughter of Hitler, or Eichmann, or Stalin, doing the same? There is something at once heroic and gracious about this lightly sketched figure, the woman who gave Moses his name.

Who was she? The Torah does not give her a name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4: 18)

² There is, of course, a midrashic tradition that Shifra and Puah were other names for Yocheved and Miriam. In the text I am following the interpretation given by Abarbanel and Luzzatto.

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."³

They added that she was one of the few (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.⁴

So, on the surface, the parsha is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women with whom there would not have been a Moses. They belong to a long tradition of strong women throughout Jewish history, from Deborah, Hannah, Ruth and Esther in the Bible to more modern figures like Sarah Schenirer and Nechama Leibowitz to more secular figures like Anne Frank, Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir.

How then, if women emerge so powerfully as leaders, were they excluded in Jewish law from certain leadership roles? If we look carefully we will see that women were historically excluded from two areas. One was the "crown of priesthood," which went to Aaron and his sons. The other was the "crown of kingship," which went to David and his sons. These were two roles built on the principle of dynastic succession. From the third crown - the "crown of Torah" - however, women were not excluded. There were prophetesses, not just prophets. The sages enumerated seven of them. There were great women Torah scholars from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) to today.

At stake is a more general distinction. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in his Responsa, Binyan Av, differentiates between formal or official authority (samchut) and actual leadership (hanhagah).⁵ There are figures who hold positions of authority - prime ministers, presidents, CEOs - who may not be leaders at all. They may have the power to force people to do what they say, but they have no followers. They excite no admiration. They inspire no emulation. And there may be leaders who hold no official position at all but who are turned to for advice and are held up as role models. They have no power but great influence. Israel's prophets belonged to this category. So, often, did the gedolei Yisrael, the great sages of each generation. Neither Rashi nor Maimonides held any official position (some scholars say that Maimonides was chief rabbi of Egypt but most hold that he was not, though his descendants were). Wherever leadership depends on personal qualities - what Max Weber called

³ Vayikra Rabbah 1: 3

⁴ Derekh Eretz Zuta 1

⁵ Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, 2nd edn., no. 65.

charismatic authority - and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men.

Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Zipporah and Batya were leaders not because of any official position they held (in the case of Batya she was a leader despite her official title as a princess of Egypt). They were leaders because they had courage and conscience. They refused to be intimidated by power or defeated by circumstance. They were the real heroes of the exodus. Their courage is still a source of inspiration today.

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; each individual came with his household....And all the souls who emerged from the loins of Jacob were seventy souls....” (Exodus 1:1,5)

These opening verses of the Book of Exodus are actually an abridged, shorter repetition of a much more detailed account of the family, which Grandfather Jacob brought with him on his journey to Egypt to meet his beloved son Joseph: "And Jacob arose from Be'er Sheba, and the Children of Israel lifted Jacob their father, their children and their wives onto the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to bring them... And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt: Jacob and his sons; the first born of Jacob is Reuven.... All the souls of the house of Jacob who came to Egypt were seventy." (Genesis 46:5, 8, 27)

Rashi and Ramban, the two most classic Biblical Commentaries, explain that with these opening verses, the Book of Exodus establishes its connection to and continuity of the Book of Genesis; they both add that the repetition of names expresses the great love that our Biblical Author (G-d!) has for Jacob and his family.

I believe that the seemingly repetitive verses contain a message that not only goes beyond this and but holds the key to understanding the major mission and national mystery of the eternity of our people.

Please allow me to interpret our opening verses by reference to a totally different issue, a question that many young Jews are asking and which raises a serious Jewish existential problem: Why get married? And even more to the point: Why have children?

About a decade ago, I was invited to lecture to the faculty, the students and general public at a European university. Since this was my first visit to that city, I arrived in the early afternoon, checked into the hotel, and set out for an exploratory walk.

It was a perfect autumnal Sunday afternoon. The weather was refreshingly cool and invigorating, the sun shone and I had at least three hours to spare before my lecture. It was an area with many parks, the architecture of the buildings was interesting and I was

greatly enjoying a few hours of rare solitude. But after a while, I felt a nagging sense that something was amiss, that a weird phenomenon could be felt roundabout. There were hardly any children.

Many adults of all ages were strolling about; I even noticed many people walking with their dogs! But almost no children. When the professor who introduced me at the public forum asked if I had had an opportunity to do some sightseeing (I had previously written to him that this would be my first visit), I shared with him and the audience the strange feelings I had about the dearth of progeny. His response almost bowled me over. "We Europeans have difficulties with younger children, who make noise and dirt and cannot be controlled; we have even greater problems with young adult children, who cost a great deal of money to be educated, who often fall short of expectations and who are generally ungrateful and insensitive..."

I was initially stunned by his words, an attitude so very different from the "children worship" which characterizes most of the Jewish and Israeli families I know. After all, the Hebrew-Yiddish word "nachas" - joyous satisfaction - is heavily identified with celebrations involving one's children and grandchildren. But then I recognized the logic of his words and when I looked into the negative population growth of the vast majority of the European countries, I realized that perhaps it is observant Jewry which is out of step with the world. However, I am truly convinced that it is precisely our Jewish obsession with progeny which is responsible for our continued survival and contemporary rebirth, and which will guarantee our future.

One early Talmudic Commentary, Rabbenu Asher (1250-1328), maintains that there is no specific command to be married; marriage is merely the necessary preparation for fulfilling the commandment "to be fruitful and to multiply." (Ketubot 1:12)

For, you see, Judaism is a grand "unfinished symphony": the Abrahamic mission is to convey to the world of nations a G-d of love, morality and peace in historic time. G-d promises through His prophets that eventually a more perfect society will be formed and the world will be redeemed. Our narrative is to be found in the Bible, our unique lifestyle, celebrations and memorials are detailed in the Talmud, and each Jewish parent lives in order to convey this mission to his/her child. To be a Jew is to parent - or to take responsibility - for a Jewish child of the next generation.

Hence the formation of our nation in the Book of Exodus emanates from the continuity of the family in the Book of Genesis. Each family of patriarchs and matriarchs bequeathed those in the direct chain of continuity. Jacob - the man and his household, the man and his forebears - came along with all of his children and their children into Egypt.

These verses are not repetition of past events; they are guideposts for our future. All Jews must carry

with them - wherever Jewish destiny takes them - the Jewish portable household civilization which formed our peoplehood. Only on the basis of that glorious past will be equipped to shape a significant and blessed future. © 2013 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah does not describe for us in any form whatsoever as to what happened to the family of Yaakov - who are now the people of Israel, and suddenly very numerous and at one time very influential and comfortable in Egyptian society - in the years between the death of Yosef and the enslavement of the Jews many decades later.

The Torah is not here to give us a narrative of interesting historical facts and, as it did in the book of Bereshith, it skips over decades and even centuries without giving us any in-depth description. But Midrash does attempt to somehow fill that void and portrays for us on one hand a people who attempted to remain separate and unique from the Egyptian majority culture by its dress, language and historical memory and yet on the other hand succumbed to adopting Egyptian gods and beliefs.

The Egyptian exile was the prototype for all later exiles. It posed the challenge of how to remain steadfastly Jewish while living under foreign rule and enmeshed in a foreign, even alien, culture and belief system. This has remained the major challenge of Jewish existence throughout the ages. This challenge accounts for the relative paucity of the number of Jews in the world and for the continuing pressures – anti-Semitic and otherwise – that constantly threaten to erode Jewish identity and even existence.

Every place of Jewish exile in the Diaspora has faced this challenge. Some localities have fared better than others in coping with it. Though the challenge has remained constant, the responses to it have varied from place to place. Apparently what may have worked successfully for one society and time may not be the correct solution for another.

It is important to note that the redemption from Egyptian exile was facilitated by Heaven through unlikely means and by a surprising champion of Israel's cause. The likely choice for becoming the redeemer of Israel from Egyptian bondage was certainly Aharon. He was present with the Jews during the darkest years of persecution and was recognized by the people as its leading personality. He led the tribe of Levi, the tribe of scholars of Yaakov's Torah and the bearers and teachers of his tradition.

His brother Moshe, who disappears from the scene of Jewish suffering in Egypt for approximately sixty years, was raised in the palace of the hated Pharaoh and does not appear to be especially articulate in speech. As a shepherd, he engages in an occupation

reviled by the dominant Egyptian society and culture. Yet it is Moshe who is the redeemer, the lawgiver, and the greatest of all prophets that the world will ever know.

It is Moshe who will teach Israel the Torah, which alone will be the necessary guarantee for Jewish survival and growth in all of the societies in which it will find itself to be part of. G-d's guidance and protection of Israel lies in providing the Jewish people with proper, even if unlikely, leadership to meet the challenges constantly imposed on a small people by varying times and place. © 2013 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, should emulate His ways. At times of suffering, we must empathize with others. 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 hear of suffering, we dare not become desensitized to the horror which is unfolding. 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 about relief and redemption. © 2013 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

Tough Love

Moshe, the humblest man who was ever on the face of this earth, the man who consistently pleaded with Hashem to spare the Jewish nation from his wrath, emerges this week for the very first time.

First impressions are almost always last impressions, so I wondered what are Moshe's first actions? Surely they would typify his future distinction.

Open a Chumash and explore the young lad who is found on the Nile, spends his youth in Pharaoh's palace, and finally "goes out amongst his brothers." He sees an Egyptian smiting a Jew and then, in a non-speaking role (at least without speaking to any human), he kills him. That is Moshe's foray in communal activism.

His first words seem diametrically opposed to his ensuing persona. The next day, Moshe "went out and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting." He immediately chastised the wicked one, "Why would you strike your fellow?" (Exodus 2:13). His admonition provokes an angry response from the quarrelers. "Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me, as you murdered the Egyptian?" (ibid. v. 4). Moshe's hallmark compassion and concern seems to be overshadowed by his forceful admonition. Is that the first impression the Torah wants us to have of Moshe?

In his youth, Reb Zorach Braverman, who later was known as a brilliant Jerusalem scholar, once travelled from Eishishok to Vilna, Lithuania. Sitting next to him was an elderly Jew with whom he began to converse. Reb Zorach commented to the old man that it was sad that in a city as large as Vilna there was no organized Torah youth group.

The old man became agitated. In a tear-stained voice he responded, "Whom do you expect to organize these groups, "he asked incredulously, " the communal leaders who are destroying Judaism in Vilna? They do nothing to promote Torah values!"

The man went on to condemn a group of parnasim who had assumed control of the community affairs and constantly overruled the Rabbinical authorities in every aspect of communal life as it related to observance of Jewish law. Reb Zorach became incensed. Who was this man to deride a group of

community elders? He responded vociferously. "Excuse me," he interrupted, " but I think you should study the new sefer (book) that was just published. It is called Chofetz Chaim and deals specifically with the laws of slander and gossip. It details all the transgressions listed in the Torah for gossip as such! In fact, I have it here with me."

The old man asked to see the book. He took it and immediately opened it to a section which specified the rare instance it was a mitzvah to speak out against a group of people, in the case when they act defiantly against rabbinic authority.

Reb Zorach remained quiet and silently took back the book. The trip ended and the old man and Reb Zorach went their ways in Vilna. It only took a day until Reb Zorach found out that he was seated next to none other than the Chofetz Chaim himself.

Of course, Moshe was the compassionate advocate for Klal Yisrael. But the Torah chooses to define his leadership in a clear and unambiguous manner in strong and controversial encounters. His first act was to kill an Egyptian who was smiting a Jew, and his second was to chastise two Jews who were fighting so strongly that they threatened to report his former act to the Egyptian authorities. After the Torah establishes an ability to reprove and even rebuke sin, only then does it tell us of Moshe's compassion in protecting the daughters of Yisro, in tending sheep by running after a tiny lamb who lost its way in the scorching dessert.

Often I hear quotes, "if Rav Moshe were alive today," or "if the Chofetz Chaim were alive today," followed by a notion that these beloved, departed, sages, with their celebrated love and compassion for all Jews, would surely ascribe to unmitigated love and acceptance of anyone's notion of Judaism as an acceptable alternative.

It's just not true. Great leaders and Torah visionaries do have tremendous love for all Jews, but they do not compromise on Torah law or on Torah values. They are vociferous advocates of right versus wrong. Though one minute they may be chasing lost sheep, running after a small child who dropped a small coin, or translating a letter for an indigent immigrant, they would not hesitate to strike the Egyptian and chastise their fellow Jew who raised his hand against another, physically or spiritually. What truly makes a great man is not only knowing how and when to hold them, but also knowing how and when to scold them.

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftarah

This week's haftarah 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. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd [Moshe] turned this way and that way, and he saw that there was no one, and he smote the Egyptian" (Sh'mos 2:12). The simplest reading of this verse is that before killing the Egyptian who was beating up an Israelite, Moshe looked around to make sure that no one was looking. Indeed, this is how some (e.g. Abarbanel, see Chasam Sofer/Toras Moshe; Rashi alludes to it as well) understand it. Rashi, based on the Midrash, explains the verse to mean that he took notice of what the Egyptian had done to the Israelite in his house (with his wife) and what he had done to him in the field (beating him), "looked" to make sure that none of his descendants would convert, and then killed him. The notion that Moshe could "see" all of the Egyptian's descendants in order to determine what would be lost if he was killed (which would prevent those descendants from being born) raises several issues.

Some armchair philosophers raise the issue of it being impossible for him to see any descendants, since Moshe killed him. Whom was there to "see"? Obviously there were no future descendants if he had no future! Nevertheless, however Moshe was able to "see" that none of the Egyptian's descendants would convert (most assume it was through "Ruach HaKodesh"), it could easily be that he "saw" what would have been had he not killed him, not a vision of any real future as if he were a time-traveler. Since Moshe saw that had the Egyptian lived he would still not have any descendants who would convert, he did not hold back from killing him.

Another "armchair philosophy" issue: If Moshe could know there'd be descendants who would convert, wouldn't that take away their ability to freely choose to do so? This is similar to the question raised regarding G-d's absolute knowledge of the future and our free-will. However, in the latter conundrum, there really is no contradiction, as G-d is outside of time, so the "future" is the same to Him as the "past" is to us. Therefore, His

knowledge is the result of our choices, even if, from our time-bound perspective it seems as if His knowledge preceded our choices. On the other hand, the Egyptian never really had any "descendants" for Moshe to somehow be informed about; they didn't exist in the "future" either, so couldn't be "known" the same way we "know" things that happened in the past. Nevertheless, G-d "knows" whether there was any potential latent within this Egyptian for anything positive to have come from him (see Targum Yonasan, also see Ayeles HaShachar, although he explains Sanhedrin 96a differently than most seem to), and Moshe could have "tuned in" to this information through "Ruach HaKodesh" and realized that there was no possibility of converts. Besides, Moshe's "knowledge" was not absolute, and could have just been that there would have been descendants who converted, not which specific ones would convert.

The commentators are perplexed as to why descendants converting would impact Moshe's decision to put the Egyptian to death. Do we take descendants into account whenever a death sentence is issued? If anything, the Talmud teaches us just the opposite: "A [pregnant] woman who was being brought out to be executed (after being convicted of committing a sin with a death penalty) is not delayed until after she gives birth" (Arachin 7a). Not only aren't we concerned about the descendants of anyone who is executed, but we don't even wait for a pregnant women to give birth (if she hasn't gone into labor yet) before executing her! Additionally, when Moshe was told to smite Midyan because of what they had done (Bamidbar 25:17), the Talmud (Bava Kama 38a) says he would have included Moav in the "smiting" (since they were at least as involved as Midyan was) had G-d not told him not to. Why was Moav excluded? Because Rus and Na'ama would come from them (Bava Kama 38b, see Rashi on Bamidbar 25:18 and 31:2). The starting point (before G-d corrected Moshe), though, is that we don't take possible future descendants into account when considering whether someone should be put to death; why did Moshe take it into account here?

[The most widely given answer is that descendants are not taken into account when the death penalty is issued by a court, but if it is issued in heaven they are. Since Moshe killed the Egyptian by uttering G-d's name (see Rashi on Sh'mos 2:14), it is as if he was killed by heavenly decree, and the descendants therefore had to be taken into account. I'm not sure why the method Moshe chose to kill the Egyptian affects what to take into account; if Moshe determined that he should be put to death, and a Jewish court would have made the same determination, then just as the court wouldn't have taken the descendants into account, Moshe shouldn't have either. (It would also seem that the decree against Midyan qualified as a "heavenly decree," since it came as a command from G-d; if Moshe knew that heavenly decrees take descendants

into account, he should have known not to include Moav without being told so explicitly.) It should be noted that Sh'mos Rabbah (1:29) says Moshe asked the angels whether the Egyptian should be killed, and they told him that he should; this would certainly qualify as being a "heavenly decree." Interestingly, this Midrash has Moshe consulting with the angels only about whether the Egyptian should be put to death, not about whether he will have any descendants who will convert; that part Moshe figured out on his own. Midrash Lekach Tov has it the other way around, with Moshe asking them about the Egyptian's descendants but not about whether or not he should kill him.]

Some (e.g. Nachalas Yaakov) compare Moshe killing the Egyptian to the youths who were killed by bears after Elisha cursed them for making fun of him (M'lachim II 2:23-24); the Talmud (Sotah 46b) says that he killed them after seeing that they had no mitzvos, "not in them, nor in their descendants until the end of all generations." However, there seem to be several differences between the two cases. First of all, Elisha was punished for this (Sotah 47a), while the Torah seems to frame Moshe's sticking up for his "brother" despite being raised in Pharaoh's palace in a very positive light. (This might simply being a function of the level of wrongdoing in each case, and/or what should have been expected from each of the wrongdoers.) Secondly, Elisha was a full-fledged prophet, and we might expect a prophet to be able to "see to the end of all generations." At this point in Moshe's life, though, he had not yet experienced prophecy, and "seeing to the end of all generations" sounds like a lot to accomplish via Ruach HaKodesh. [Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe) says Moshe didn't see that Dasan and Aviram were watching despite having "turned this way and that" to make sure that no one was around because he hadn't yet reached the level of prophecy and had to focus intently on being able to "look" at the Egyptian's descendants through Ruach HaKodesh.] Nevertheless, making such a comparison may yield an interesting possibility.

If Elisha acted inappropriately by cursing these youths (as the Talmud indicates), it is difficult to attribute his being able to "see" their potential descendants to prophecy. Is prophecy a "tool" to be used at the prophet's discretion, regardless of whether it will be used for appropriate things, or is it a level through which one can become attuned to things on a spiritual plane? Although I don't have any first-hand experience with prophecy, it seems to be the latter. Therefore, when he was belittled by the youths, his being a prophet was likely not a factor in his being able to "see" their descendants (only in his curse being effective, since despite this error he was still a holy person). I would suggest that rather than actually "seeing" their descendants, Elisha had worded his curse to include the stipulation that it only apply if the youths were so bereft of mitzvos that there was no possibility of any

good ever coming from them. Since there were no mitzvos "in them or their descendants," the stipulation was fulfilled and the curse became active.

This can be applied to Moshe as well. Seeing the Egyptian beating the Israelite, Moshe realized that if he didn't do anything, the Israelite would be murdered (see Sh'mos Rabbah 1:28). He wanted to stop the beating, but didn't want to kill the Egyptian if he could ever contribute anything positive. Therefore, using G-d's holy name, he cursed the Egyptian that he should die if he wouldn't have had any descendants who would convert. Since there wouldn't be any, the curse became active, and the Egyptian died. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah tells us, "And Joseph died, and all his brothers, and that entire generation" (Exodus 1:6).

Why is it important for us to know that the whole generation has passed on?

The Ohr HaChaim explains that the enslavement of the Israelites by the Egyptians occurred in three stages: First, Joseph died and the Israelites lost their power. Second, the brothers died. As long as even one of the brothers was alive, the Egyptians still honored them. Third, everyone from that generation died. Until that happened -- as long as the members of the first generation were alive -- the Egyptians considered them important and were not able to treat them as slaves.

Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, the Mirrer Rosh Hayeshiva, commented that there are two aspects here. One is on the side of the Egyptians. They were unable to treat the Jewish people as slaves as long as they considered them important. The other aspect is on the side of the Jewish people themselves. As long as they were considered important and worthy of respect by themselves, the Egyptians were not able to treat them in an inferior manner. Only when they personally considered themselves in a lowly manner could they be subjugated by others. This, said Rav Chaim, is the way in which a person's sense of self impacts his destiny -- first the person feels inferior and guilty, then he feels a sense of worthlessness and then he is easy prey.

What is the antidote? A person should strive to internalize elevated feelings about himself. When a person has those feelings, he will be careful to not do anything that will lower his level of self-esteem. If feelings of self-respect and importance are an inherent part of a person's self-image, others will not be able to exploit one's vulnerability through lack of self-esteem. *Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2013 Rabbi K. Packouz & aish.com*

