

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

**M**oses' second question to G-d at the burning bush was, Who are you? "So I will go to the Israelites and say, 'Your fathers' G-d sent me to you.' They will immediately ask me what His name is. What shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13). G-d's reply, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, wrongly translated in almost every Christian Bible as something like "I am that I am," deserves an essay in its own right (I deal with it in my books *Future Tense* and *The Great Partnership*).

"His first question, though, was, *Mi anochi*, "Who am I?" (Ex. 3:11).

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" said Moses to G-d. "And how can I possibly get the Israelites out of Egypt?" On the surface the meaning is clear. Moses is asking two things. The first: who am I, to be worthy of so great a mission? The second: how can I possibly succeed?

G-d answers the second. "Because I will be with you." You will succeed because I am not asking you to do it alone. I am not really asking you to do it at all. I will be doing it for you. I want you to be My representative, My mouthpiece, My emissary and My voice.

G-d never answered the first question. Perhaps in a strange way Moses answered himself. In Tanakh as a whole, the people who turn out to be the most worthy are the ones who deny they are worthy at all. The prophet Isaiah, when charged with his mission, said, 'I am a man of unclean lips' (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said, 'I cannot speak, for I am a child' (Jer. 1:6). David, Israel's greatest king, echoed Moses' words, 'Who am I?' (2 Samuel 7:18). Jonah, sent on a mission by G-d, tried to run away. According to Rashbam, Jacob was about to run away when he found his way blocked by the man/angel with whom he wrestled at night (Rashbam to Gen. 32:23).

The heroes of the Bible are not figures from Greek or any other kind of myth. They are not people possessed of a sense of destiny, determined from an early age to achieve fame. They do not have what the Greeks called *megalopsychia*, a proper sense of their own worth, a gracious and lightly worn superiority. They did not go to Eton or Oxford. They were not born to rule. They were people who doubted their own abilities. There were times when they felt like giving up. Moses,

Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah reached points of such despair that they prayed to die. They became heroes of the moral life against their will. There was work to be done – G-d told them so – and they did it. It is almost as if a sense of smallness is a sign of greatness. So G-d never answered Moses' question, "Why me?"

But there is another question within the question. "Who am I?" can be not just a question about worthiness. It can also be a question about identity. Moses, alone on Mount Horeb/Sinai, summoned by G-d to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, is not just speaking to G-d when he says those words. He is also speaking to himself. "Who am I?"

There are two possible answers. The first: Moses is a prince of Egypt. He had been adopted as a baby by Pharaoh's daughter. He had grown up in the royal palace. He dressed like an Egyptian, looked and spoke like an Egyptian. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from some rough shepherds, they go back and tell their father, "An Egyptian saved us" (2:19). His very name, Moses, was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:10). It was, presumably, an Egyptian name (in fact, Moses, as in Ramses, is the ancient Egyptian word for "child". The etymology given in the Torah, that Moses means "I drew him from the water," tells us what the word suggested to Hebrew speakers). So the first answer is that Moses was an Egyptian prince.

The second was that he was a Midianite. For, although he was Egyptian by upbringing, he had been forced to leave. He had made his home in Midian, married a Midianite woman Zipporah, daughter of a Midianite priest and was "content to live" there, quietly as a shepherd. We tend to forget that he spent many years there. He left Egypt as a young man and was already eighty years old at the start of his mission when he first stood before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:7). He must have spent the overwhelming majority of his adult life in Midian, far away from the Israelites on the one hand and the Egyptians on the other. Moses was a Midianite.

So when Moses asks, "Who am I?" it is not just



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that he feels himself unworthy. He feels himself uninvolved. He may have been Jewish by birth, but he had not suffered the fate of his people. He had not grown up as a Jew. He had not lived among Jews. He had good reason to doubt that the Israelites would even recognise him as one of them. How, then, could he become their leader? More penetratingly, why should he even think of becoming their leader? Their fate was not his. He was not part of it. He was not responsible for it. He did not suffer from it. He was not implicated in it.

What is more, the one time he had actually tried to intervene in their affairs – he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who had killed an Israelite slave, and the next day tried to stop two Israelites from fighting one another – his intervention was not welcomed. “Who made you ruler and judge over us?” they said to him. These are the first recorded words of an Israelite to Moses. He had not yet dreamed of being a leader and already his leadership was being challenged.

Consider, now, the choices Moses faced in his life. On the one hand he could have lived as a prince of Egypt, in luxury and at ease. That might have been his fate had he not intervened. Even afterward, having been forced to flee, he could have lived out his days quietly as a shepherd, at peace with the Midianite family into which he had married. It is not surprising that when G-d invited him to lead the Israelites to freedom, he resisted.

Why then did he accept? Why did G-d know that he was the man for the task? One hint is contained in the name he gave his first son. He called him Gershom because, he said, “I am a stranger in a foreign land” (2:22). He did not feel at home in Midian. That was where he was, but not who he was.

But the real clue is contained in an earlier verse, the prelude to his first intervention. “When Moses was grown, he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labour” (2:11).

These people were his people. He may have looked like an Egyptian but he knew that ultimately he was not. It was a transforming moment, not unlike when the Moabite Ruth said to her Israelite mother-in-law Naomi, “Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth was un-Jewish by birth.

Moses was un-Jewish by upbringing. But both knew that when they saw suffering and identified with the sufferer, they could not walk away.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called this a covenant of fate, *brit goral*. It lies at the heart of Jewish identity to this day. There are Jews who believe and those who don't. There are Jews who practise and those who don't. But there are few Jews indeed who, when their people are suffering, can walk away saying, This has nothing to do with me.

Maimonides, who defines this as “separating yourself from the community” (*poresh mi-darkhei hatsibbur*, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 3:11), says that it is one of the sins for which you are denied a share in the world to come. This is what the Hagaddah means when it says of the wicked son that “because he excludes himself from the collective, he denies a fundamental principle of faith.” What fundamental principle of faith? Faith in the collective fate and destiny of the Jewish people.

Who am I? asked Moses, but in his heart he knew the answer. I am not Moses the Egyptian or Moses the Midianite. When I see my people suffer I am, and cannot be other than, Moses the Jew. And if that imposes responsibilities on me, then I must shoulder them. For I am who I am because my people are who they are.

That is Jewish identity, then and now. ©2017  
*Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**"A**nd Pharaoh commanded his entire nation saying, every male baby born must be thrown into the Nile, while every female baby shall be allowed to live.” [Ex. 1:22] In decreeing the destruction of the Israelites in Egypt, why does Pharaoh distinguish between the genders? Apparently afraid to keep the Israelite men alive lest they wage a rebellion against him, Pharaoh is confident that the Israelite women will not pose a threat, as they will presumably marry Egyptian men and assimilate into Egyptian society.

This strategy underscores Pharaoh's ignorance – or denial – of the pivotal role women play in the development of a nation, and stands in stark contrast to the perspective of our Sages [Midrash *Yalkut Shimoni*], who declare that it was “in the merit of the righteous Israelite women that the Jewish People were redeemed from Egypt”.

The Talmud [Shabbat 118b] teaches, “I always call my wife ‘my home,’ since the real bulwark of the home is the woman of the house. As the Jewish nation emerged from a family, and family units are the bedrock of every society, it is clearly the women who are of supreme importance.

Pharaoh was blind to this. Apparently, he had no tradition of matriarchs such as Sarah and Rebecca, who directed the destiny of a national mission. For him,

women were the weaker gender who were there to be used and taken advantage of. This is why Pharaoh attempts to utilize the Hebrew midwives to do his dirty work of actually murdering the male babies on the birth stools. To his surprise, the women rebelled: "And the midwives feared the Lord, so they did not do what the king of Egypt told them to do; they kept the male babies alive" (ibid. 1:17).

Taking it one step further, the Talmud [Sotah 11b] identifies the Israelite midwives as Yocheved (the mother of Moses and Aaron) and Miriam, their sister. The Midrash continues that Amram, their husband and father, respectively, was the head of the Israelite court. Upon learning of Pharaoh's decree to destroy all male babies, he ruled that Israelite couples divorce, in order to cease reproduction. After all, why should people continue normal married life, only to have their baby sons killed?

Miriam chides her father: "Your decree is more harsh than that of Pharaoh! He made a decree only against male babies, but you are making a decree against female babies, as well." Amram, persuaded by his daughter's rebuke, remarries Yocheved, who conceives and gives birth to Moses, savior of Israel from Egyptian bondage.

Miriam is actually following in a fine family tradition of fortitude and optimism. Her grandmothers, the mothers of Amram and Yocheved, gave birth to children during the bleakest days of oppression. Despite the slavery and carnage all around, one mother gives her son the name Amram, which means "exalted nation"; the other mother gives her daughter the name Yocheved, which means "glory to G-d." Such was their confidence in the potential of the Jewish People and their faith in the Source of their people's greatness.

These two women were able to look beyond the dreadful state to which the Israelites had fallen in Egypt; their sights were held high, upon the stars of the heavens which G-d promised Abraham would symbolize his progeny and the Covenant of the Pieces which guaranteed the Hebrews a glorious future in the Land of Israel. These two proud grandmothers from the tribe of Levi merited grandchildren such as Moses, Aaron and Miriam.

Pharaoh begins to learn his lesson when Moses asks for a three-day journey in the desert; Pharaoh wants to know who will go. Moses insists: "Our youth and our old people will go, our sons and our daughters will go – our entire households will go, our women as well as our men" [ibid. 10:8]. A wiser Pharaoh will now only allow the men to leave; he now understands that he has most to fear from the women!

And so it is no wonder that Passover, the festival of our freedom, is celebrated in the Torah with "a lamb for each house," with the women included in the paschal sacrificial meal by name no less than the men. In our time, we find this idea expressed in the

observances of the Passover Seder (the drinking of the four cups of wine, the eating of matza, and the telling of the story of the exodus, etc.), which are binding on women no less than men.

A Postscript:

One of my strongest childhood memories take place at a Seder at the home of my maternal grandparents. The entire family, including the seven married children of my grandparents, as well as their children, comprised well over fifty participants, My grandfather led the entire gathering in the reading of the Haggadah word for word; when anyone had a question about any of the passages, he/she was encouraged to ask. My grandfather would then always defer to my grandmother to give the answer, because he greatly respected the fact that she had learned Talmud with her father, the Dayan (rabbinical court judge) Rav Shlomo Kowalsky. Indeed, during the Seder, when my grandmother would go into the kitchen to check on the pots of food, my grandfather would stop the Haggadah reading until my grandmother re-joined us at the table, and only then would the Seder continue.

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**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

## Wein Online

**T**here are crises that develop slowly and gradually while there are others that are sudden, surprising and unexpected. We see that in Jewish history both types of difficulties abound. The fall of the northern kingdom of Israel – that of the ten tribes – was sudden and unexpected. Only a short time before the northern kingdom of Israel had been one of the major military powers in the area.

The destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem and of the kingdom of Judah more than a century later was a long drawn out affair completely predictable and predicted. In perfect hindsight, a strong case can be made that based on the history of anti-Semitism in Europe and especially its virulence in the period between the two world wars of the twentieth century, the occurrence of a Holocaust, though perhaps not its magnitude could also have been foreseen.

The enslavement of the Jewish people in Egyptian bondage was certainly something that was unexpected and unforeseen. Even though the Jewish people had a tradition from their forefather Abraham that they would be enslaved in a strange country for a considerable period of time, they apparently did not feel that Egypt was that country and that this would be that time.

After all, Joseph was the savior of Egypt and the Jews felt comfortable living in Egypt and, to a certain extent, even integrating themselves into the general Egyptian society. All of this would be to no avail for there would arise a Pharaoh who chose not to acknowledge Joseph and the past and turned his

unjustified wrath against the Jewish population of Egypt. And this all happened rapidly and almost without warning.

There are conflicting opinions in Midrash regarding the spiritual standards of the Jewish people before and during their enslavement there. There is an opinion that they were traditional, G-d-fearing and stubborn. They retained their language, mode of dress and moral behavior. There is another almost opposite opinion that they too had become pagans, worshiped idols and were not very different than the other members of Egyptian society at that time.

One can easily say that both opinions are correct because they are referencing different groups within the Jewish people. The tribe of Levi remained loyal to the tenets of the house of Jacob and to the monotheistic tradition, which made it unique amongst all nations of that ancient world. However, undoubtedly there were many others, perhaps even the vast majority of the Jewish people, who assimilated completely into Egyptian society.

They were the victims of an anti-Jewish decree that they never understood. After all, they were good Egyptians, so why were they singled out for enslavement. The Midrash also teaches us that a vast number of these Jews never made it out of Egypt when the eventual redemption occurred. This perhaps was even voluntary on their part for we see that throughout the years in the desert of Sinai, there was a constant call from some of the Jews to return to Egypt even if that meant slavery and hardship.

The original exile of the Jews in Egypt serves as a paradigm for all later exiles and persecutions, no matter if they come on suddenly or gradually. This makes this Torah reading extremely relevant to our current Jewish world. ©2017 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 information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**J**ust before Moshe (Moses) sees the burning bush (sneh), the Torah tells us that he leads his flock to the farthest end (ahar) of the desert. (Exodus 3:1)

Commentators offer different suggestions as to the meaning of ahar. Saadia Gaon (Babylonia, 10th C.) understands the text as denoting a specific spot—at the end of the desert—where the sneh was located. Hizkuni (R. Chizkia ben Manoach, Northern France, 13th C.) notes that ahar teaches us that Moshe took his flock just beyond the desert, as it was there that he was able to find vegetation for his sheep.

While Saadia Gaon's and Hizkuni's comments teach us that ahar points to a physical place, Seforno

(R. Ovadia Seforno, Italy, 16th C.) sees ahar as illustrating why Moshe was suitably prepared for the encounter with G-d. Moshe, goes far away, for only there could he properly meditate before encountering G-d.

But, it was left to the master commentary, Rashi (R. Shlomo ben Yitzhak, Northern France, 11th C.), to offer a different approach to the question of ahar. According to Rashi, Moshe took his flock beyond the desert (ahar) to graze. It was there, in no man's land, land owned by no one, that Moshe felt he had the right to graze his flock, knowing that his animals would steal from no one.

Interestingly, the word ahar appears in yet another moment of deep human meeting with G-d. When the angel of G-d tells Avraham (Abraham) not to sacrifice Yitzhak (Isaac), Avraham sees a ram caught in the thicket. There too, the Torah states in an unusual way, that the ram was –ahar. (Genesis 22:13) Perhaps the Torah uses the term ahar to again teach that the ram was “beyond” (ahar) in the sense that it belonged to no one. Being ownerless, Avraham felt he could take it and sacrifice it instead of Yitzhak.

An important message emerges from these incidents. One would imagine that in a moment of religious ecstasy, one could use whatever means at his/her disposal to rendezvous with G-d. After all, shouldn't one be able to expropriate property from anyone if it is needed in the worship of the Lord? The word ahar powerfully rejects this idea. The pathway to reaching out to G-d involves extreme sensitivity to our fellow person. In a deeply ecstatic spiritual moment, both Moshe and Avraham are careful not to connect with G-d by taking that which belonged to another.

Seforno's comment is important, as it teaches that encountering G-d requires spiritual preparation. Rashi's understanding goes further. Ahar teaches that the ultimate preparation in engaging G-d is how one acts towards another. As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said, on the road to worshipping G-d, one should be extremely careful not step on others along the way. ©2017 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ**

## Shabbat Shalom Weekly

**W**hen Moshe was told by the Almighty that he would be the leader to approach Pharaoh to demand freedom for the Israelites, Moshe replied: "Please my Master, send anyone else" (Exodus 4:13). Why did Moshe seek to avoid this position of leadership?

The Ramban, Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, explains that Moshe told the Almighty to send anyone else because he believed that any other person in the

world would be more fitting than Moshe for this mission.

At first glance this is puzzling. How could Moshe sincerely have thought of himself as unworthy? Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin explained that even if a person is very intelligent and wise and has accomplished very much, he nevertheless might not be working as hard as he should. With his talents and abilities he might have accomplished a lot more if he tried harder. On the other hand, a person who has accomplished little is perhaps doing all that he can. This person is reaching his potential while the accomplished person might be far from it.

For this reason Moshe felt he was unworthy. In his humility, he thought that he was further from fulfilling his potential than everyone else.

This is a lesson for two types of people. Those who feel arrogant and conceited because of their great intellect and accomplishments should be aware that perhaps they are far from reaching their potential. This should lessen their inflated feelings about themselves. For this exact same reason, those who are trying very hard and put forth great effort should not feel envious or disheartened when they see others apparently accomplishing more than them.

One's true spiritual level cannot be measured by any mortal. There is no accurate objective means of evaluating any person. The true level of each person is based entirely on effort and this only the Almighty can measure. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

#### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## Tough Love

**M**oshe, 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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### YOUNG ISRAEL OF PASSAIC-CLIFTON

## The Message and the Messenger

by Rabbi Jack Love, [l'iluy nishmas imi, morasi Toibe bas R' Yitzchak, aleha hashalom]

**M**oshe<sup>1</sup> receives explicit instructions as to what to say to Par'oh. "You shall say to him, 'Y' the G-D of the *ivrim* appeared to us, hence, may we go on a three day journey in the desert and sacrifice to Y' our G-D?"<sup>2</sup> Moshe, through Aharon, delivers quite another message to Par'oh. "So says the Y', G-D of Yisrael, 'release my people that they may celebrate to me in the desert.'<sup>3</sup> It takes Par'oh's well provoked (even justified) indignation to remind the brothers that their message and tone was out of line. "The G-D of the *ivrim* appeared to us," they say, at last, " may we go on a three day journey in the desert and celebrate to Y' our G-D lest He harm us with plague or sword."<sup>4</sup> Not that the second try got any better results, nor, for that matter were they to told to expect any better, but the second message was more like their original mandate.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The word *mose* in Egyptian meant son, as in Toth-mose, son of Toth or Ra-m'ses, son of Ra. The royal princess, Bythia, called her adopted child *mose*-son (or **son** without the usual son of) because she drew him from the water. The use of the Hebrew *m'shisihu* juxtaposed with Moshe is a Hebrew play on words. Ibn Ezra zl suggests that both the name and the reason are translations from the Egyptian or that the princess was acquainted with Hebrew. His problem is best expressed by Ibn Ezra in his explanation of the name *tzaf'nas pa'aneach*. (41:45) "If the name is Egyptian we don't know what it means, and if it is a translation, we don't know the name." Our suggestion seems to answer his question.

<sup>2</sup> Sh'mos 3:18.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 5:1.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 5:3.

<sup>5</sup> The addition of the threat of plague and sword was not, as Rashi zl explains, a veiled threat to Par'oh but rather a way of rationalizing the original *faux pas*. To wit, the command in the first statement was really directed at Yisrael and not Par'oh, and the blurting out of the seemingly insulting

The received statement was a respectful request of a monarch to allow an insignificant foreign band<sup>6</sup> to travel for a few days to keep some ancestral ritual. The message which was given was an order, it referred to Yisrael, a particularly proud clan with a history in Egypt, and made no mention of the distance they would travel. Needless to say, the original was delivered one message too late, but why?

All prophecy to some extent is filtered through the prism which is the prophet himself. "Though one idea can appear to two prophets, no two prophets prophecy in the same style."<sup>7</sup> The same message, when expressed through the filter of one prophet's personality, will come out different than it will through another's.

In fact, interpretation of a prophecy is, in itself, part of the prophet's inspired talent. Yirmiyahu's initiation into prophecy included a test of his insight into the vision he saw. "What do You see Yirmiyahu?" And I said, 'I see a rod of an almond tree (*shaked*).' 'You've seen well,' said G-D, 'for I hurry (*shoked*) to do this thing.'<sup>8</sup> It was Yirmiyahu's prophetic insight, his *ruach hakodesh*, which allowed him to "see" that the import of the message lay in the type of tree thus allowing for the play on words. "If your prophets be [prophets] of G-D, I will make myself known to him in a vision, in a dream I would speak to him."<sup>9</sup> Visions and dreams need interpretation. And interpretation depends on the style of the interpreter.

"Not so My servant Moshe . . . in a vision with no allegory, he sees the picture of G-D." Moshe's prophesy needed no interpretation. He was not to be an agent of G-D but rather a conduit for the word of G-D. As our sages put it, "the *sh'china* would speak through his throat"

"Moshe prophesied using 'So says G-D,' and other prophets prophesied using, 'So says G-D.' Add to this that Moshe [also] prophesied using, 'This is what

statement could thus be attributed to Moshe's own anxiety out of fear for his people.

<sup>6</sup> Avraham is called an *ivri* while still in C'naan. Yosef, the midwives, according to the Midrash, and Moshe the infant are so called by the Egyptians. It is quite improbable that the name was given to one particular family especially when that family called itself Yisrael. The Chazal suggest two alternatives: that all descendants of Ever were so named or that all who came from "the other side" (*ever*) of the Jordan were termed *ivrim*. The two aren't mutually exclusive. Moshe was to defer to the xenophobic Egyptian by referring to the *ivrim* rather than the more chauvinistic Yisrael. Bnei Yisrael are never called *ivrim* again after the exodus from Egypt except when referring to an *eved ivri*, a Hebrew slave, both in Sh'mos 21:2 and D'varim 15:12. The implication that the term refers in some way to Yisrael's slave status is belied by the referral to Avraham yet the connection is interesting to say the least.

<sup>7</sup> B. Sanhedrin 89a.

<sup>8</sup> Yirmiyahu 1: 11-12.

<sup>9</sup> B'midbar 12:6.

G-D commanded.”<sup>10</sup> *Ko* (so) in Hebrew implies a paraphrase, *zeh* (this) implies the exact words. Moshe’s “job” included both paraphrasing the message and speaking the message he was given without filtering it through himself. This balance of *ko* and *ze* must not have been an easy thing to learn. “When the Blessed Holy One [first] appeared to Moshe he was a tyro to prophesy.”<sup>11</sup> The message he was given to convey would still naturally be processed, as would other prophets’ messages.

The man Moshe we are introduced to is from the beginnings of his interpersonal relationships a man who cannot bear injustice. Be it an Egyptian who beats a Hebrew, a Hebrew hitting another or a shepherd band molesting a group of girls. In this soil grows the kernel which would be the harbinger of G-D’s law and order on this world. The ultimate prophet is, above all, the ultimate seeker of justice. In the end Moshe would bring mankind to G-D, but only by bringing G-D and his Torah to man. For this mission the messenger must be one who in and of himself sees the purpose of mankind as higher than it sees itself. One who feels that injustice and abuse are not part of the natural order. That abusers are not meant to live nor is his life worthwhile if he doesn’t risk it to save another. This would be the *ish ha’elo-im* the representative who would show how G-Dly man could be. This is the man who is sent with a message to Par’oh. The message of an oppressed people will be filtered through this man.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Rashi to B’midbar 30:2 from B. Nedarim 77a.

<sup>11</sup> Midrash Rabbah Sh’mos 3:1. The word *tyro(n)*, Greek and Latin for novice, was misinterpreted by the commentators as ruler or leader. Both the desire to see Moshe represented as he would ultimately be seen and a misreading of the word as *tyranus*, ruler, are responsible for the error. Ramban zl seems ambivalent about the level of Moshe’s prophesy at the burning bush. On the one hand, he refutes Ibn Ezra’s claim that it was an angel who addressed Moshe, “since Moshe, the greatest of prophets would not hide his face from an angel.” (to 3:2) On the other, he explains that Moshe’s not being allowed to approach and his covering his face are attributed to his, “not having yet reached his great level of prophesy . . . which refers to him as ‘seeing the picture of G-D.’” (to 3:6) Once again, though, (to 3:13) he states that Moshe merely asked to know by which attribute he was being sent since, “Moshe was even at that time the father of great wisdom in the levels of prophesy.”

I would seem that, according to Ramban, Moshe was no novice (the above midrash notwithstanding but also not dealt with) but had not yet reached the level of complete revelation. The idea expressed in the text above would not contradict this. Moshe would be assigned to speak with *zeh* but would still be influenced by elements of self.

<sup>12</sup> Moshe, in the end, actually does become the human **filter** for G-D’s word. The book of D’varim, according to the Vilna Gaon zl, is the word of G-D as interpreted by Moshe. After having brought the people to a “face -to-face” encounter with G-D, he is asked to intercede between them and G-D in further conversation. Moshe becomes the paradigm of

But this natural proclivity of Moshe’s was not the only thing the message was filtered through before reaching Par’oh. The vision at the bush was not Moshe’s last encounter with G-D before coming to Par’oh. He was given a preview of the dreaded plagues which were to be visited upon Egypt including the ultimate threat of the death of the first-born.<sup>13</sup> Although these were to be brought on Egypt only after Par’oh’s anticipated refusal, the prophesy was quite real and, therefore, quite influential on Moshe’s state of mind. Add to this the very real experience of G-D’s wrath threatening both his own life and that of his son,<sup>14</sup> and it is quite easy to understand the mind set with which Moshe approached Par’oh. The message “Please let us go for a three day journey . . .” filtered through that mind set would well come out as, “or else.”<sup>15</sup>

This might also explain Moshe’s bewilderment at Par’oh’s not reacting immediately by releasing Yisrael or G-D’s not immediately having stricken him and caused Yisrael’s release. The reality of the last prophecy was so total that he could not see the course to freedom as being one of stages.

For this he was rebuked<sup>16</sup> soundly. Moshe was compared unfavorably with the Patriarchs though their level of prophesy was far less than that of Moshe even at this stage. Moshe Rabeinu needed to grow into his role.

Moshe’s potential was to be the greatest of the prophets like whom “no prophet would arise in Yisrael”<sup>17</sup> Avraham’s potential was to be the personification of the attribute of kindness, Yizchak, of justice and Yaacov of truth. No one person has the potential of another to reach that level of that particular

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*torah she’b’al peh*, man’s interpretation of G-D’s word. This only after he totally becomes a vehicle for G-D. Only after total self-negation to the word of G-D is one’s **self**-worthy of being the proper filter and prism for that word. This is the case with all prophets (V. Rambam, Yad, Yesodei Hatorah, 7:1) but both the self-negation and the self reached their ultimate in the “father of the prophets.

<sup>13</sup> 4:21-23

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.24-26

<sup>15</sup> That the prophet psychologically experiences his prophesy is attested to by Yechezk’el who is nauseated by the thought of using human excrement to make his bread even though it is merely a prophetic allegory he envisions. Yonah was disheartened by Ninve’s being spared since he was so involved in having to prepare them, and himself, for their destruction. R’ Yom Tov Ashbili (Ritva) zl similarly answers the Ramban’s question about Rambam zl’s opinion of the prophesy of the Patriarchs. Rambam claims that the Patriarchs experienced prophesy only in dreamlike visions. Ramban asks why Yaacov would limp after his wrestling with the angel if it were only a dream. (On B’raishis 18:2) Ritva answers that the prophetic experience is so real, even in dream form, that a psycho-physical reaction is not at all strange.

<sup>16</sup> V. Rashi to 6:2.

<sup>17</sup> D’varim 34:10.

purpose he serves in creation. But no-one, in this "the world of action" can reach the fulfillment of their potential without growth through trial and error. It is not always the trial but often the error as well through which we grow. © 1998 Rabbi J. Love

**DR. ISRAEL RIVKIN AND JOSH RAPPS**

## Shiur HaRav Soloveichik

**T**he Midrash comments on the opening verse in Parshas Shemos "Tov Shem Mishemen Tov etc." (A good Shem is far more valuable than the best of oils), The Rav noted that the same sentence of Ayleh Shmos Bnay Yisrael Habaim Mitzrayma is used in Parshas Vayigash as well. Why did the Midrash see fit to use the comment of Tov Shem in Shemos but not in Vayigash?

The Rav noted that in Hebrew, the word Shem is used for 2 things: (1) a name (2) a reputation. In other words, a person acquires a reputation that is linked with his name.

In Parshas Vayigash, the verse Ayleh Shemos is simply stating the names of the children of Yaakov who accompanied him to Egypt. In Parshas Shemos, the Torah mentions the great reputation that these giant personalities carried with them as Shivtei Kah. The Rav asked how we know this. Maybe the verse in Vayigash is referring to their reputations?

Obviously their reputations grew beyond what they were initially on their arrival in Egypt. The simple proof to this is that they grew in Egypt into true Baalei Teshuva, when they asked Yosef for forgiveness after the death of Yaakov. Had they been completely repentant while Yaakov was alive for their actions towards Yosef, they never would have been fearful of Yosef seeking retribution from them for what they did to him. Their seeking forgiveness from Yosef at that time epitomized their status as true Baalei Teshuva.

There was a span of hundreds of years between the Ayleh Shemos in Parshas Vayigash and that of Parshas Shemos. This period of time was needed to allow Bnay Yisrael to grow into a Goy Gadol, a great nation. As the Midrash comments on the verse of Arami Ovayd Avi... Vayehi Sham Lgoy Gadol, had Bnay Yisrael not gone through their experience in Egypt they would have remained a small clan, but never would have attained the status of a great nation. We have remained a Goy Gadol to this day because of our experiences in Egypt. The Zohar comments that the Rechush Gadol that they were to leave Egypt with was their becoming a Goy Gadol. The Shevatim were able to attain great status in Egypt that they would not have reached had they remained in Canaan.

The Rav explained further how the Shevatim grew in reputation during their stay in Egypt. Before Yaakov passed away he requested that Yosef ensure that Yaakov would be buried in Mearat Hamachpela. Yaakov knew that he could rely on Yosef, the Prime

Minister of Egypt to accomplish this task. Before Yosef passed away he also desired that he be buried in Eretz Yisrael. Who did he ask to guarantee this? He did not ask his own children, Menashe and Efrayim.

Instead he told all the Shevatim that eventually Hashem will redeem them from Egypt and they should remember to carry his remains with them. Who picked up this responsibility?

Levi and Shimon had conspired to kill Yosef that fateful day when Yosef was sold into slavery. If anyone would have carried animosity towards Yosef all those years, it would have been Levi.

Yet Moshe, who was a direct grandson of Levi, from both sides, was the one who took it upon himself to locate Yosef's remains and ensure that they were transported from Egypt through all the years that they wandered in the desert. One could well imagine, that having grown up in the Beis Levi, if anyone from Levi's immediate family felt animosity towards Yosef, they would have planted in Moshe the seeds of hatred towards Yosef.

Perhaps Moshe might not have made such a super human effort all those years in the desert in taking upon himself the responsibility of transporting Yosef's remains. He might have left it for someone of Yosef's immediate family to take care of. Apparently, Moshe must have been told by his family about the greatness of Yosef and how he saved so many people in times of crisis. Moshe had the tradition of Pakod Yifkod passed down from Yosef to his brothers and he kept the promise because that was the positive Mesorah about Yosef that he was taught by his parents, both of whom came from Beis Levi.

Levi who was Yosef's greatest enemy, in the end, through Teshuva, became his friend. This was a reflection of their great names and how their reputation grew during their stay in Egypt. That is why the Midrash of Tov Shem Mishemen Tov is used in Shemos and not in Vayigash. By the beginning of Sefer Shemos, their reputations as Baalei Teshuva and Shivtei Kah were well established. The Torah is telling us that "These are the great Shemos, reputations of the Bnay Yaakov who acquired their reputations through their stay in Egypt. © 1996 Dr. Israel Rivkin and Josh Rapps, Edison, N.J.

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