

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

I have become increasingly concerned about the assault on free speech taking place throughout the West, particularly in university campuses. This is being done in the name of "safe space," that is, space in which you are protected against hearing views which might cause you distress, "trigger warnings" and "micro-aggressions," that is, any remark that someone might find offensive even if no offence is meant.

So far has this gone that at the beginning of the 2017 academic year, students at an Oxford College banned the presence of a representative of the Christian Union on the grounds that some might find their presence alienating and offensive. Increasingly, speakers with controversial views are being disinvited: the number of such incidents on American college campuses rose from 6 in 2000 to 44 in 2016.

Undoubtedly this entire movement was undertaken for the highest of motives, to protect the feelings of the vulnerable. That is a legitimate ethical concern. Jewish law goes to extremes in condemning lashon hara, hurtful or derogatory speech, and the sages were careful to use what they called lashon sagi nahor, euphemism, to avoid language that people might find offensive.

But a safe space is not one in which you silence dissenting views. To the contrary: it is one in which you give a respectful hearing to views opposed to your own, knowing that your views too will be listened to respectfully. That is academic freedom, and it is essential to a free society. As George Orwell said, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."

John Stuart Mill likewise wrote that one of the worst offences against freedom is "to stigmatise those who hold the contrary opinion as bad and immoral men." That is happening today in institutions that are supposed to be the guardians of academic freedom. We are coming perilously close to what Julian Benda called, in 1927, "The treason of the intellectuals," in which he said that academic life had been degraded to the extent that it had allowed itself to become an arena for "the intellectual organisation of political hatreds."

What is striking about Judaism, and we see this starkly in this week's parsha, is that argument and the hearing of contrary views is of the essence of the

religious life. Moses argues with God. That is one of the most striking things about him. He argues with Him on their first encounter at the burning bush. Four times he resists God's call to lead the Israelites to freedom, until God finally gets angry with him (Ex. 3:1-4:7). More significantly, at the end of the parsha he says to God: "Lord, why have you brought trouble on this people? Why did You send me? Since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has brought trouble on this people, and You have not rescued Your people at all." (Ex. 5:22-23).

This is extraordinary language for a human being to use to God. But Moses was not the first to do so. The first was Abraham, who said, on hearing of God's plan to destroy the cities of the plain, "Shall the Judge of all the earth not do justice?" (Gen. 18:25).

Similarly, Jeremiah, posing the age-old question of why bad things happen to good people and good things to bad people, asked: "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all the faithless live at ease?" (Jer. 12:1). In the same vein, Habakkuk challenged God: "Why do You tolerate the treacherous? Why are You silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" (Hab. 1:13). Job who challenges God's justice is vindicated in the book that bears his name, while his friends who defended Divine justice are said not to have spoken correctly (Job 42:7-8). Heaven, in short, is not a safe space in the current meaning of the phrase. To the contrary: God loves those who argue with Him -- so it seems from Tanakh.

Equally striking is the fact that the sages continued the tradition and gave it a name: argument for the sake of heaven, defined as debate for the sake of truth as opposed to victory. The result is that Judaism is, perhaps uniquely, a civilisation all of whose canonical texts are anthologies of arguments. Midrash operates on the principle that there are "seventy faces" to Torah and thus that every verse is open to multiple interpretations. The Mishnah is full of paragraphs of the form, "Rabbi X says this while Rabbi Y says that." The



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Talmud says in the name of God himself, about the conflicting views of the schools of Hillel and Shammai, that "These and those are the words of the living God."

A standard edition of Mikraot Gedolot consists of the biblical text surrounded by multiple commentaries and even commentaries on the commentaries. The standard edition of the Babylonian Talmud has the text surrounded by the often conflicting views of Rashi and the Tosafists. Moses Maimonides, writing his masterpiece of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, took the almost unprecedented step of presenting only the halakhic conclusion without the accompanying arguments. The ironic but predictable result was that the Mishneh Torah was eventually surrounded by an endless array of commentaries and arguments. In Judaism there is something holy about argument.

Why so? First, because only God can see the totality of truth. For us, mere mortals who can see only fragments of the truth at any one time, there is an irreducible multiplicity of perspectives. We see reality now one way, now another. The Torah provides us with a dramatic example in its first two chapters, which give us two creation accounts, both true, from different vantage points. The different voices of priest and prophet, Hillel and Shammai, philosopher and mystic, historian and poet, each capture something essential about the spiritual life. Even within a single genre, the sages noted that "No two prophets prophesy in the same style." Torah is a conversation scored for many voices.

Second, because justice presupposes the principle that in Roman law is called *audi alteram partem*, "hear the other side." That is why God wants an Abraham, a Moses, a Jeremiah and a Job to challenge Him, sometimes to plead for mercy or, as in the case of Moses at the end of this week's parsha, to urge Him to act swiftly in defence of His people. (See Pesachim 87a-b for a remarkable passage in which God criticises the prophet Hosea for not coming to the defence of his people.) Both the case for the prosecution and the defence must be heard if justice is to be done and seen to be done.

The pursuit of truth and justice require the freedom to disagree. The Netziv argued that it was the prohibition of disagreement that was the sin of the

builders of Babel. What we need, therefore, is not "safe spaces" but rather, civility, that is to say, giving a respectful hearing to views with which we disagree. In one of its loveliest passages the Talmud tells us that the views of the school of Hillel became law "because they were pleasant and did not take offence, and because they taught the views of their opponents as well as their own, indeed they taught the views of their opponents before their own."

And where do we learn this from? From God Himself, who chose as His prophets people who were prepared to argue with Heaven for the sake of Heaven in the name of justice and truth.

When you learn to listen to views different from your own, realising that they are not threatening but enlarging, then you have discovered the life-changing idea of argument for the sake of heaven. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2018 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Moses said to God, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" [Ex. 3:11] It is "received wisdom" that successful leaders must possess a certain level of ego and degree of narcissism in order to survive the rigors of leadership. After all, who in their right mind could believe he or she has the capacity or competence to run a country? And who could possibly withstand non-stop criticism and attacks from adversaries while contending with ongoing backbiting by purported allies?

Perhaps it is because the role is so difficult and the challenges so daunting that many people like to see in their leaders the trait of exceptionalism that makes it possible to survive and thrive under such harsh conditions. They want their leaders to be strong, confident and effective in pursuing their nation's interests, and if that necessitates an inflated ego, so be it.

But what if a nation's leader was quite the opposite, fleeing the limelight instead of chasing after it? What if repeated attempts to recruit him were met with compelling reasons why he was, in fact, the wrong person for the job? Could such a person lacking in ego and narcissism possibly command the confidence of those he is meant to lead?

This is the situation in which we find ourselves in Parshat Shemot, as Moses repeatedly demurs when God turns to him to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt. Moses is clearly the best choice, from the Divine perspective: did he not sacrifice a life as prince of Egypt in order to avenge the life of a Hebrew slave? [ibid., 2:11-12]

Unfortunately, Moses derives the very opposite message from that same incident. When, shortly afterwards, he attempts to stop two Hebrews from fighting, his previous involvement is scorned by the Hebrews themselves: "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Will you kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" [ibid., v. 13-14].

Moses understandably concludes that being the leader of the Jewish People will bring much heartache, so he lets God know that he is not on the market. Presaging U.S. General William Tecumseh Sherman (1820-1891), Moses feels as the Civil War hero did when asked about any presidential ambitions: "If drafted, I will not run; if nominated, I will not accept; if elected, I will not serve."

Eventually, Moses's insistence on his own lack of fitness for leadership reaches its limits, resulting in an extreme Divine reaction: "...the anger of God was kindled against Moses..." [ibid., 4:14].

The Midrash even deduces that the Almighty punishes Moses for his reluctance by removing the priesthood from his shoulders and transferring it to Aaron. "Aaron was initially slated to be the Levite and you [Moses], the Kohen, but I shall now switch the honors. I shall elevate Aaron to priest and demote Moses to Levite" [Talmud, Zevachim 102b, cited by Rashi]. But are the hesitations of Moses not expressions of great humility?

After citing several legitimate reasons for refusing the call to serve, perhaps Moses should have raised the white flag of surrender, accepting the wisdom of God's choice. But no, he continues his protest: the people might well accept God, but they will not necessarily accept him as God's messenger [Ex. 4:1].

The Almighty gives Moses a sign: "What is that in your hand?" Moses answers, "A staff." God then instructs Moses to throw the staff on the ground, and it miraculously turns into a snake. "Grab it," orders God, and as Moses does, it miraculously becomes a staff again.

I would like to suggest that in addition to its dramatic presence, this sign reflects what is at the heart of leadership. God is telling Moses: if you want the people to believe in you, the first criterion is that you must believe in yourself. Know that in your hand, Moses, is the staff of leadership, a mastery you earned when you smote the Egyptian taskmaster.

Remove the staff of leadership from yourself and it will turn into the serpent, symbol of Egyptian tyranny and hedonism. In this world, you either lead or you will be led. Now, grasp on to the tail of the serpent, and you will once again be grasping the staff of leadership. It depends on you!

Moses's subsequent life in leadership teaches that leadership has nothing to do with ego and narcissism; rather, it has to do with demonstrating the

quintessential traits of leadership, to act proactively and decisively. He does not always succeed, to be sure. But as long as he believes in himself, then God will be with him. Hopefully, the people will believe in him, as well, and indeed, one of Moses's crowning achievements is piloting the great exodus of the Jewish People out of Egypt. ©2018 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah reading of this week introduces us to the figure and person that will dominate all of Jewish life – and perhaps world civilization as well – for eternity. Though the Torah tells us of Moshe's birth, salvation from the crocodile infested Nile River, and his early life as the adopted son of the daughter of the Pharaoh, including the incident of his smiting of the Egyptian taskmaster, which causes him to flee Egypt, it then tells us almost nothing of the ensuing decades of his life.

Where did he flee? How did he occupy himself for over half of his life? How did he arrive at the well in the land of Midyan? Probably the greatest question of all is why did the Lord choose him to be the redeemer of Israel and the greatest lawgiver of all time.

The Torah itself is silent on all of these matters, even though one could think that this knowledge would be vital to understanding the biblical narrative itself. Nevertheless, Midrash attempts to answer some, if not all, of these questions in its holy and many times allegorical methodology.

It makes Moshe a king over tribes in Africa, it grants him years of study and holy meditation and it attempts to give us a picture of the great prophet-in-waiting until the moment of his calling arrives. I have always wondered why the Torah itself makes no mention or description of these crucial years in a lifetime and development of Moshe. It allows him to emerge full-blown as the great prophet and leader of Israel without any preparatory background as to why he was chosen.

The Torah does however tell us of an incident where Moshe physically intervenes to protect the daughters of Yitro from the discrimination and persecution of the male shepherds at the well in Midyan. Moshe stands up for the rights of strangers whom he does not know at the time. Moshe, among his all other Godly characteristics, has an extreme sense of right and wrong, of protecting the downtrodden and reigning in the powerful. It is this sense that drove him to smite the Egyptian taskmaster who was unmercifully beating the Jewish slave.

No matter what happened to Moshe in the intervening years of his life, from that incident to the time that we see him in Midyan, it is obvious that that overpowering sense of justice and rectitude never waned. This is what will allow him later in his mission to

constantly defend the Jewish people even from the Lord's judgment. He realizes that the redemption from slavery is a wrenching and difficult experience.

That is the reason why the Torah emphasizes to us that Moshe was a shepherd immediately prior to becoming the leader and savior of Israel. A shepherd by nature must be a compassionate, patient and forgiving person. Otherwise the sheep would never survive his shepherding. The Torah wants to emphasize to us that the true spiritual leader of Israel is humble, self-effacing, patient and possessed of a burning desire to replace wrong with right and evil with goodness. ©2018 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

When 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. However, an accomplished person might be far from reaching his potential.

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 ©2018 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

And we, created in God'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 God feels our anguish, so too should we feel the anguish of others. Only when feeling the pain will we, as God did here in the Book of Exodus, be impelled to act and do our share to bring about relief and redemption. ©2018 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 DAVID S. LEVIN

Burning Significance

The beginning of Moshe's service to Hashem and the Jewish People occurs in our parasha at the Burning Bush. The parasha first gives us a brief history of the exile in Egypt and the enslavement of the B'nei Yisrael under very trying conditions. Several hundred years of history is glossed over in a few sentences culminating in the birth of Moshe and his miraculous rescue from death in the Nile by Par'oh's daughter. Moshe's childhood at the Palace is never mentioned until he kills an Egyptian beating a Jew. His escape from Egypt and his days with Yitro, his father-in-law, receive limited coverage also until his encounter with Hashem at the Burning Bush. The next four parshiot all cover one year in Moshe's life. Therefore, it is important for us to understand this incredible moment in Moshe's life and the significance of the Burning Bush to his role as the leader of the Jewish People.

The commentators first speak of the significance of the lowly bush as the place from which Hashem chose to speak to Moshe. Hashem could have chosen a tall tree or a lofty peak but instead chose a small bush on a lowly mountain. (We are reminded that the bush is on Har Sinai, the place where Moshe will bring the people in order to receive the Torah from Hashem.) Hirsch explains that this was to demonstrate that there is no place which is too humble to be a resting place for Hashem. The Mekhilta of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai discusses the toughness of this bush compared to tall trees. The thorns on this bush face inwards (unlike the thorns on a rose which face outwards). A bird landing on a tree can easily escape, but when landing on this bush will enter and find it impossible to exit without severely damaging its wings. This is very similar to the words of the Yalkut Shimoni which speaks of a man thrusting his hand into this bush but finding it impossible to extricate it. Professor Nechama Leibovitz quotes R. Eliezer ben Arakh to say that Hashem purposefully spoke from a low place to demonstrate that He regards those who are downtrodden and lowly. The Aznayim L'Torah tells us that the word *hasneh* has the numerical value of one hundred twenty which was a hint to Moshe that he would live one hundred and twenty years. All of these are indications of the purpose of the bush, but there are other symbols as well.

The *eish* (fire) that was present in the bush but not consuming it was not a normal fire. Hirsch speaks of fire as Hashem's method of announcing His presence on Earth. We see this clearly in the smoke which covered Har Sinai when He descended on the mountain to give us His Torah. The fire itself is referred to as *eish dat* or the fire of the Law. According to

Hirsch this fire contained the power of fire "to refine and purify us, to warm us, and to quicken and enliven us." Man is encouraged to "give up every phase of (his) life to be fuel for this Fire of Hashem." Yet just as the bush is not consumed by the fire, neither should we lose our own identity as fuel for our relationship to Hashem and His Torah. Others liken the fire to the torture that the Jews suffered under the Egyptians. This "fire" was meant to destroy the Jews and slow their increase in population. Yet this torture had the opposite effect. The Jews not only survived the difficulties placed on them but increased in number and spread out throughout the land.

The Rabbis also speak about the appearance of the angel from within this fire on the bush. The Ramban tells us that this was the angel Michael and there is never a time when Michael appears that the Shechinah, Hashem's presence in the World, does not appear. This is what Moshe noticed before Hashem spoke to him. First the angel appeared but Moshe was not prepared to see Hashem until he set his mind to receive prophecy. When Moshe then turned to see the bush again Hashem spoke to him from within the bush. The Da'at Mikra explains that upon seeing that this "angel" had appeared only to direct his attention to the bush so that Hashem could speak to him, Moshe hid his face so that he would not look upon Hashem when He spoke to him, "vayasteir Moshe panav ki yarei meihabit el haElokim, and Moshe hid his face because he was afraid to look towards Elokim." Moshe did not yet have the relationship with Hashem through prophecy that would enable him to speak to Hashem "panim el panim, face to face."

There are many theories as to the actual identity of this bush. One interesting theory is that the bush described is the caper bush. The caper bush conforms with the Midrash which speaks of the thorns pointing inward making it difficult to escape. Without Hashem's guidance, the B'nei Yisrael would never have been able to escape the slavery of Egypt both physically and spiritually. But there is another message which we find from the caper bush. The bush which insinuates itself into the minutest cracks in the Kotel is the caper. This bush also inserts itself into the most difficult terrains throughout the land of Israel. It is almost as if the caper bush is a sign of the promise by Hashem to give His people this land and to increase their numbers like the stars in the sky and the sands of the shore. It is also a sign of hope, for no matter how much one cuts back the caper bush, it continues to expand and grow.

We all begin our relationship with Hashem on a low level much like the bush. As youngsters we hear stories, which are mostly midrashim, and a few incidents in the Torah which give us a very immature understanding of Hashem. As we grow and study Torah more, we begin to realize a deeper

understanding of the entire system which Hashem has given us to set order in the World. We hear of the concept of reward and punishment and we fear judgment both now and at the end of our days. We obey Hashem out of this fear but not yet out of a greater appreciation for the perfection of His system as a way of Life. Many of us cease to grow beyond this elementary understanding of Hashem because our days of "study" have ended. Those who choose to continue learning and thinking whether formally or informally strive to go beyond that limited education. They choose to study more Torah, Halacha (Mishnah, Gemara, Shulchan Aruch, Mishneh Torah, Mishna B'rurah, etc.), Jewish Philosophy, and Musar. But study is not enough. They find time in their day to perform mitzvot which help others such as visiting the sick, volunteering in organizations that help the poor, caring for those who are often overlooked by society, and befriending those who are in need of friends. In this way may we all become elevated to the point that we are zocheh to have a relationship with Hashem that is similar to Moshe's relationship. Even if we cannot reach that level, let us not fail to strive to achieve that level as best we can. ©2018 Rabbi D.S. Levin

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Suspicion

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

"A person who suspects an innocent man, will be punished physically ("Hachoshed bchshirim lokeh begufo"). This is one of the themes in this week's portion as Moshe loses faith in the Jewish people when he says "V'hem lo yaaminu li" (and they will not believe me). This would seem to be a good reason not to suspect another Jew of committing a sin. However two stories are told of Rabbi Yehoshua, which seem to indicate that he didn't care if people suspected him, nor whether he suspected others of wrong doing.

One story is found in tractate Derech Eretz. Rabbi Yehoshuah welcomed a guest to his home and gave him a place to sleep in the loft. Before retiring Rabbi Yehoshua removed the ladder which was used to gain access to the loft. In the middle of the night this guest gathered all of Rabbi Yehoshua's utensils and attempted to leave the house with them. In the morning the man was found at the bottom of the loft with a broken neck. Rabbi Yehoshua concluded "All people should be looked upon as robbers".

The question that is obvious is how could Rabbi Yehoshua suspect this person when we know that one is not permitted to suspect another person?

Various answers are offered. Some say that this law (not to suspect another person) only applies to someone you know, such as Moshe in relation to Israel or the Elders of the Sanhedrin in relation to the High

Priest. Those regarding whom you do not know, one may suspect.

A second answer offered is that in the case of Rabbi Yehoshua the guest had already been suspected of wrongdoing and thus Rabbi Yehoshua had a right to suspect him.

A second story is found in Tractate Shabbat (127;2). One time Rabbi Yehoshua had to speak to a Roman noblewoman. He went with his students but before he entered the closed room with this woman he took off his Tefillin. When he completed his meeting he asked his students if they suspected him of wrongdoing. They responded that they judged him favorably as there could easily be a valid explanation. How did Rabbi Yehoshua place himself in a position that his students would be tempted to judge him unfavorably?

Perhaps we can answer that Rabbi Yehoshua knew his students well and he also knew the kind of education that they received from him and was confident that they would not judge him unfairly. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"Now Yosef died, as well as all his brothers and all that generation." (Shemos 1:6) I always find it somewhat depressing. You can feel the storm coming already by the end of last week's parsha, with the death of Yosef. You can tell it's going to be downhill from there, and you find out just how quickly at the beginning of this week's parsha. All the "big guys" have died off, and the fledgling nation is left to tread Egyptian water on its own.

Fortunately, you don't have to read too much further to get some hope. Within a few lines, the Savior is born. True it will be another 80 years before he can be effective, but at least redemption is on its way. Although, that would have been a tough sale for those living through those 80 years, especially after Moshe Rabbeinu became an outlaw and was forced to skip the country and did not give any sign that he planned to come back.

Ya'akov Avinu died in 2255 from Creation. The last of his sons, Levi, died in 2331. The next year the oppression began in 2332. Moshe Rabbeinu was born in 2368, exactly 36 years after it did. Considering Kabbalah says that Moshe was born with the Ohr HaGanuz, the Hidden Light of Creation, which Chanukah teaches us is represented by the number 36, that couldn't have been a coincidence.

Actually, Chanukah teaches that the Ohr HaGanuz is represented by two numbers, 25 and 36. The first number, 25, represents the light while it is still hidden in Creation, and the number 36 represents the light after it has been revealed. Moshe Rabbeinu's birth was a revelation of the light, as the Talmud explains: It

is written here, "And she saw that he was good" (Shemos 2:2), and there it is written, "God saw the light, that it was good" (Bereishis 1:4). (Sotah 12a)

As explained before (see the book, "The Equation of Light"), just as 11 must be added to 25 to arrive at 36, likewise "Da'as," Godly Knowledge, represented by the number 11, must be added to a person to allow them to draw out the Ohr HaGanuz from Creation and reveal it. Moshe Rabbeinu's soul Kabbalah explains, originated from the level of Da'as, giving him tremendous access to the Ohr HaGanuz.

What did this mean to his life? Weird stuff. Like being floated as a baby in a dangerous river, and still ending up safe in the arms of the daughter of the king who wants you dead. Like being raised in his palace like a son, while being be cared for by your own mother who is the sworn enemy of your adopted father. Like being sent to execution and having your neck turn to marble and breaking the executioner's sword instead of the other way around.

It meant fleeing and becoming king of a strange people along the way for a while before continuing on to Midian. It meant being shown a bush that burned but which was not consumed, and hearing God talk from it. It meant being able to do a whole host of other miracles, the greatest of which was actually entering Heaven and receiving Torah.

It meant becoming the channel for ALL of Torah, that which was known in Moshe Rabbeinu's time and that which would come out in every generation after his death. And, it meant that he will come back to finish the job he started, and which the nation was not ready for at the time. Moshe Rabbeinu will be the final Moshiach, and he will dazzle the world with the miracles he will perform as he carries out the Final Redemption.

But what about those 80 years of waiting for the rest of the nation? The Vilna Gaon explains what the Talmud means when it says that redemption has to come little by little. It's because the Jewish people do not merit a fast redemption, and to have one would mean breaking from either too much suffering, or too much good.

The Jewish people thought that Moshe Rabbeinu's arrival meant instant redemption. They were horrified to find out that it meant instant increase in slavery. Impossible slavery. Even Moshe Rabbeinu left disheartened, thinking he had failed.

Even after returning to actually redeem the Jewish people, it took a year of plagues before they finally went out. After the plagues began, the slavery did not stop immediately. By the time it did, most Jews had already lost their desire to go out, dying instead in the Plague of Darkness.

It was not about showing off God's power, at least not primarily. The world did have to learn about God and His judgment, but the delay in redemption was

for the sake of the Jewish people. They were not ready for redemption when Moshe Rabbeinu started it. They had to be ready for it by the time he finished it.

That took time.

And suffering.

And emunah, because the situation looked very ungeulah-like for a long time. People have their expectations about how redemption should unfold, or they at least hope it will unfold. No one enjoys suffering they didn't choose to undergo. Most are desperate to get rid of it any way they can, especially if they can't see how it is to their benefit.

We go to doctors expecting cures that instantly work 100 percent, and become despondent when they barely work at all. We employ technicians to immediately fix our appliances and are very disappointed when they can't. We expect results, good ones, and we expect them right away.

Like Eisav. As his name means, he wants everything ready-made for instant gratification. He doesn't want to wait for what he needs. "Hey Ya'akov, just pour that red food down my throat like now! I don't want to have to wait!"

Fast food is an example of this. It's such a part of our culture to be able to get a quick meal. You walk into a fast food place, place your order, and within minutes you have a full course meal at a "decent" price. We go online and accomplish in seconds what it used to take days, weeks, maybe even months to complete. Instant redemption on so many different levels!

The Torah says, "Woe, wait a minute. Slow down. You want to eat? Go wash your hands and make a brochah. Then sit down at a table in a dignified manner, and make a brochah over your food. When you are finished and satiated, make another couple of blessings to thank God for what you enjoyed, for your "redemption" from hunger."

The upshot of this? No matter how fast we want to be redeemed from any situation of need, we have to understand that a fast redemption may be detrimental to our long term well-being. Redemption comes, eventually, when it is to our benefit. Patience is more than a virtue, it is a saving grace.

Moshiach may have been with us for the last 80 years, and God may have been working with him to pave the road to the Final Redemption. But, for our own good, it has been taking place in stages, and so much of it out of our eyeshot. We can't necessarily prove it at this time, but we have to have faith that it is true if we want to be a part of it when it finally goes from hidden to revealed. ©2018 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

When Yocheved and Miriam, the two midwives responsible for delivering the Jewish babies, were ordered by Paroh to kill all the newborn

boys, they disobeyed a direct order, thereby risking their lives. In explaining this to us, the Torah says that G-d rewarded them, the nation prospered and multiplied, and G-d "built them houses" (1:20-21) -- not literal houses, but rather that their descendants would become great pillars of Jewish leadership and religion (Rashi). From the way the Passuk (verse) elucidates it, though, it seems that they were rewarded AND there were houses built for them. Were they rewarded twice? If so, why?

Rabbi Rubman points out that the Passuk says that it wasn't because they risked their lives that they were rewarded with great descendants, but because they feared G-d that they deserved it. The reason for the double-language is because they were 1) rewarded for risking their lives, and 2) houses were built based on their fear and respect of G-d. What's unique about these rewards is that their fear/respect of G-d is what warranted eternal reward, and NOT their life-risking actions. The Torah's message is that the motives behind our actions are sometimes more important than the acts themselves, even if the act is life threatening. The Torah's message is that it truly is the thought that counts. ©2014 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Be'eros

"**M**oshe was shepherding the sheep of his father-in-law Yisro, a priest of Midian...and he arrived at the Mountain of G-d." Be'er Yosef: "A midrash points out that sheep keep turning up in the lives of great figures in Tanach. 'HKBH does not bestow greatness upon a person without first testing him regarding small things.' It offers two examples. Both Moshe and Dovid began their training by tending to sheep, only graduating to become shepherds of Hashem's holy flock after successfully proving themselves as capable and responsible in regard to the four-footed kind."

This may sound pretty, but it is entirely counterintuitive. Does it not make more sense to subject a candidate for a leadership position to some difficult tests, rather than measuring him in regard to a "small thing?"

Moreover, in the case of Moshe, he had already passed such tests. He displayed courage, loyalty and determination in Egypt, where he endangered himself by intervening against the Egyptian who was beating the Jew. He paid a stiff penalty for that episode, having to flee for his life. Nonetheless, when he came upon the shepherd women who were being harassed by the local men, he thought nothing of his own safety, and once again intervened to correct an injustice. Wasn't this behavior stronger evidence of his greatness and worthiness to lead?

In fact, there was no greater evidence of the suitability of Moshe and Dovid than their very selection

by HKBH! Surely Hashem chose people who were suitable to lead -- great in wisdom, righteousness, and of sterling character. Moshe is called the "man of G-d;" Dovid is called "one mighty in courage, a warrior, understanding in all matters...and Hashem was with him." Chazal apply all of those descriptions to Dovid's abilities in Torah study.

Indeed, Hashem knew well whom He chose and why He chose them. Moshe and Dovid did not have to prove themselves. The test/ nisayon each was subjected to was intended to demonstrate to others who they were, to make manifest the wonderful traits each possessed.

Why sheep? Because what Hashem wanted them to show was that they were capable of enormous concern for small, trivial things. An effective leader must be able to address the needs of his people, which often are quite pedestrian and commonplace. People of exalted spirit and intellectual accomplishment often have a difficult time relating to matters that are not exclusively lofty, intellectually stimulating, and infused with spirituality. Moshe's head and spirit were in the heavens -- but he could still trudge a distance to care for a single, lost sheep, and then trudge back with the exhausted sheep flung across his back.

Similarly, Dovid was able to provide compassionate care to each animal in his flock -- the young, the old, the weak, the strong -- each according to its needs. He provided this care even after honing his spiritual skills, after developing that deveikus to Hashem we see in Tehilim. Dovid did not grow aloof and remote from trivial concerns, but maintained his spiritual elevation even as he threw himself into work that was far from elevated.

This, then, is the meaning of the midrash that Hashem chooses His leaders through "small things:" He determines that, despite their greatness, the candidates are able to effectively deal with small, everyday matters, and relate to the petty needs of all people, those who are great and those far from great. ©2014 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

