

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

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 God summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until God becomes angry and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the genesis of a hero.

But this is only the surface tale. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another 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 Yocheved, 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 small ark floated down the river, and it

was she 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 goes further. In a remarkable Midrash, we read of how, upon 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 his young daughter Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him and persuaded him to change his mind. "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. (Shemot Rabbah 1:13) 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. Ordered to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1:17). 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 many lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilisation: 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, lies 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.

(There is, of course, a Midrashic tradition that

Shifra and Puah were other names for Yocheved and Miriam (Sotah 11b). In seeing them as separate women, I am following the interpretation given by Abarbanel and Luzzatto.)

The fifth is Tzipporah, 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, we see it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4:24-26). The impression we gain of her is a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, had a better sense than Moses himself of what God 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 him 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 mention her name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4:18) references a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she whom the Sages identified as the woman who saved Moses. The name Bitya (sometimes rendered as Batya) means "the daughter of God". From this, the Sages drew one of their most striking lessons: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: "Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You are not My daughter, but I shall call you My daughter." (Vayikra Rabbah 1:3)

They added that she was one of the few people (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime. (Derech Eretz Zuta 1)

So, on the surface, the parsha of Shemot is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women without 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 religious 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 (Megillah 14a). There have been great women Torah scholars always, from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) until 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). 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 Rambam held any official position (some scholars say that Rambam 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 "charismatic authority" -- and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men.

Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Tzipporah 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. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Book of Exodus begins the story of the people of Israel, the nation that developed from the household, or the family, of Jacob. Many are the differences between the Book of Genesis and the Book of Exodus, but perhaps the greatest change lies in the "personality" (as it were) of God Himself.

Genesis, the book of creation, refers to God at first as Elohim, the sum total of all the powers of the Universe, who created the heavens, the earth and all of their accoutrements. And this God of the creation, actually the God Who was there before creation and Who brought creation into being, works very much alone: God creates, God speaks, God calls forth.

Very different is the God of the Exodus; at the opening of this book, God defines Himself as Ehyeh

Asher Ehyeh, "I will be what I will be," the essence of being into the future, the God of history. In effect, God is saying that He will be, He will effectuate, He will bring about freedom and redemption, but in an indefinite time that cannot be revealed to Moses.

Why not? Because God now has partners. Firstly His Israelite covenantal partners from the Covenant Between the Pieces of Abraham (Gen. 15); secondly, the nations roundabout and especially the very powerful Egypt; and of course the leaders of Israel, especially Moses, and Moses's brother Aaron and sister Miriam.

You see, if Genesis is the book of creation, Exodus is the book of history and history is an ongoing process between God and His Chosen Nation, between God and the nations of the world; God will effectuate, but only together with the cooperation of His partners.

For the remainder of the Five Books of the Pentateuch, Moses will be the strong towering figure, from servitude to freedom to revelation, to wandering in the desert, to our entry into Israel. And strangely enough, he is introduced in our biblical portion with no personalized mention of pedigree: "A certain man of the House of Levi went and married a Levite woman; the woman conceived and bore a son... and she hid him for three months." (Ex. 2:1).

Why are Moses's parents anonymous? Perhaps because it really doesn't matter who your parents are: It matters who you are. Perhaps because we shall learn that he had a second mother who nurtured him, who saved his life from the baby-slaying Egyptians, who named him her son (Moses, in ancient Egyptian, means "son") and brought him up in Pharaoh's palace—perhaps to teach us that only someone who came from the "outside" could free himself of the slave mentality and emancipate the Hebrew slaves. Or perhaps to teach us that although the Egyptians enslaved us, it was also an Egyptian woman who endangered her life to save a Hebrew child.

It is only in Chapter 6 of Exodus that we learn the names of Moses's biological parents, and trace his pedigree from his parents Amram and Jochebed all the way back to the Children of Jacob; and this study of his roots comes just at the time that he is about to confront Pharaoh for the first time and begin his mission to free the Hebrew slaves. Nevertheless, the Bible tells us nothing at all about Moses's parents, their characters or their activities; we are only informed their names.

To be sure, we will learn much from the Bible about the almost superhuman achievements of Moses, who was not only a great political liberator but who also "spoke to God face to face" (as it were) and revealed God's Torah laws for all posterity. We will also come to know his remarkable siblings, Aaron and Miriam.

But we cannot help but be curious about the two individuals who bore and to a great extent raised

the three greatest leaders in Jewish history.

I may not know much about the parents of Moses, Aaron and Miriam, but I do know volumes about the grandparents of these three extraordinary people. Just imagine the circumcision ceremony which was made for Moses' father and the simhat bat for Moses's mother, rituals which must have occurred in fearful secrecy during a period of slavery and persecution.

The history of the children of Israel seems to be ending almost before it began, in the hellholes of Pithom and Raamses, in the turpitude of debasement and oppression.

Nevertheless one set of parents choose to name their son Amram, "exalted nation," and the other set of parents choose to name their daughter Jochebed, "glory to God." These grandparents had apparently been nourished on the Covenant Between the Pieces, upon the familial prophecy of "offspring who will be strangers in a land not theirs, who will be enslaved and oppressed, but...in the end will go free with great wealth" (Gen.15:13-14), and will return to the land of their fathers.

And these grandparents apparently inspired their grandchildren with faith in the exalted status of their nation, a nation that will eventually bring the blessing of freedom and morality to all the families of the earth and with the ability to give glory to God in the darkest of times because they knew that eventually His great light would shine upon all of humanity. Yes, I may not know much about Moses' parents, but by the names they bestowed upon their children I know volumes about Moses' grandparents! ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

It is difficult to imagine a more unlikely scenario than the one described for us in the Torah as to the process of redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. We can readily understand a personality of holiness and tranquility such as Aaron becoming the hero and redeemer of the holy people of Israel. We could also easily understand that the redemption could come from negotiations and the recognition by Pharaoh and the Egyptians that it was in their best interests to allow the Jewish people who escaped from slavery. Yet, that certainly is not the way the Torah presents this story for us.

Instead, the redeemer is an unlikely figure, not even part of the Jewish story for approximately half of his lifetime. Not only that, he risked his life on behalf of the Jewish people but, in fact, was betrayed by Jews themselves. And he is a reluctant Redeemer, telling the Lord, so to speak, to find someone else to do the job for he feels that he is not capable to fulfill the task at hand.

Heaven disregards all his complaints and accepts none of his excuses. Heaven is aware of all

human shortcomings and assigns great tasks for individuals to fulfill irrespective of the inadequacies that they may feel.

Moshe is the most humble and modest of all human-beings, but he is not allowed to be humble and self-effacing at this moment. We see him in his most aggressive and assertive mode when speaking to the Pharaoh. For when it comes to the time to redeem the Jewish people, he cannot be fainthearted, passive, or subservient any longer.

In our time over the past century the redemption of Israel, the ingathering of the exiles to our ancient homeland, the establishment of the state of Israel and the revival of Torah values and study in the Jewish world all have occurred in a most unusual fashion. The logical odds against it happening were and are enormous but nevertheless it has happened and in front of our very eyes. Perhaps we would have chosen to have different leaders in a different series of events and policies that could have brought all this about. But it is well known that Heaven mocks all our pretensions and predictions.

The prophets of Israel have clearly told us that our redemption is a certainty and will occur. How this will happen was never spelled out for us in detail. The Jewish people will be rebuilt in our ancient homeland of the land of Israel and we see that this is happening in our days. We are taught that the wonders that we shall see and experience in this final redemption will outdo even the wonders and miracles that marked our exodus from Egypt under the leadership of Moshe over three millennia ago. Experiencing Jewish life is not for the faint hearted nor the doubters nor the weak willed. This is only one of the many insights and lessons that we can derive from the Torah reading of Shemot. ©2021 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

Anti-Semitism is unfortunately alive and well. Its roots are presented in the beginning of the Book of Exodus. The Bible written thousands of years ago teaches lessons about Jew-hatred and how we should respond – lessons that resonate to this day.

· Exodus 1:8 – “A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef (Joseph)”: How often has it occurred that Jews have contributed mightily to a country’s economy, only to have their contributions forgotten.

· Exodus 1:9 – “And he said to his people, behold the nation of Israel”: This is the first time we are called a nation. Interestingly, we are so designated by the Pharaoh. Even Jews who wish to assimilate are often reminded of their Jewishness by anti-Semitic

leaders.

· Exodus 1:9 – “much too numerous than (mi’menu) us”: The prefix “mi” can be comparative – “than us,” or diminishing – from us. Pharaoh’s claim was the latter, a claim that we’ve heard over the millennia. Whatever the Jews’ success was stolen from us.

· Exodus 1:10 – “Let us deal wisely with them”: Why must Pharaoh deal wisely? After all, he was the king of a powerful kingdom and could have vanquished the Jews in an instant. Ramban writes that Pharaoh needed time to convince his own people of the “goodness” of his plan. On top of that, the Jews would have fought back. “Wisely” means he sought a plan to begin with subtle anti-Semitism. With time, the Egyptians would buy in, the Jews would be broken, and anti-Semitism would become overt.

· Exodus 1:10 – “they (the Israelites) may join our enemies in fighting against us”: Here, Pharaoh drops the hint that the Jews can’t be trusted; they’re a fifth column. Their citizenship in Egypt is questioned because of dual loyalty – their greater loyalty to Israel.

· Exodus 1:11 – “So they set taskmasters over them”: The subtle anti-Semitism begins with understandable taxation, working a few days a week for the government.

· Exodus 1:13 – “The Egyptians ruthlessly imposed upon the Israelites”: Here, Pharaoh steps up the oppression, working the Jews daily with rigor.

· Exodus 1:22 – “Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, ‘Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let every girl live’”: In asking the Egyptians to kill all males born, Pharaoh takes cover. When questioned, he’d respond – it wasn’t me, but the people who spontaneously rose up.

· Exodus 2:11 – “And Moshe (Moses) grew up and went out to (el) his kinsfolk, and saw (va’yar) their affliction.” When hearing of an anti-Semitic act, it is crucial to run to (el) the community being attacked, empathizing (the deeper meaning of va’yar) with their suffering.

· Exodus 2:11 – “He (Moshe) saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew (ivri).” He was attacked, says the Netziv, only because he was a Jew. Anti-Semitism must be called out without fear, whatever its form or disguise (i.e. anti-Zionism).

· Exodus 2:12 – “He turned this way and that way.” We must stand strong using every means at our disposal (turning this way and that way) to push back (i.e. activist, political and legal). It is critical as well to respond to hate with good deeds, moving from a reactive defense of our people to a proactive commitment to our ideals.

I was born at the tail end of the Shoah. Deeply affected by my parents’ stories of what occurred, I was a “Never Again” Jew. At barricades, protesting for Soviet Jewry and Ethiopian Jewry and demanding

security for the State of Israel, we would scream, "Never Again! We will never allow anti-Semitism to rear its ugly head again."

If someone would have told me fifty years ago that in a half-century we would be facing the threat of anti-Semitism as our community faces today, I would have said – impossible. And yet, here we are. Seventy-five years after the Shoah, anti-Semitism is alive and well.

In every generation, anti-Semitism takes new forms. But the Bible teaches that as much as it differs, it remains the same. ©2021 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 LEVIN

Moshe's False Sense of Inadequacy

There are several conversations in the Torah: Hashem and Avraham at the Brit bein HaBitarim where the servitude of the B'nei Yisrael in Mitzrayim was foretold, the argument to save the people of Sodom, the Aseret HaDibrot (Ten Commandments), and numerous instructions of halachot (laws) given to Moshe. Other than the instructions to build the Mishkan (Temple) in the desert, these thirty-five p'sukim comprise the longest conversation in the Torah. They constitute a picture of a very reluctant servant who is not confident in himself and appears to look for excuses to avoid his assignment.

Moshe's first statement comes when Hashem appears to him from the Burning Bush and tells him to go to Par'oh and free the people. "Moshe replied to Elokim, 'Who am I that I should go to Par'oh and that I should take the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt?'" Rashi believes that Moshe questions whether he is significant enough to meet with Par'oh and if the B'nei Yisrael are deserving of such a miracle. Sforno does not place that same emphasis on the unworthiness of the B'nei Yisrael but instead returns the emphasis to Moshe. Moshe wanted to know how he was worthy to have that miracle come from him. Our Rabbis tell us that Moshe was more humble than any other human being, and his humility is evident throughout his conversation with Hashem. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch tells us that Moshe says to Hashem, "You set before me two mighty tasks, I am to master Par'oh and Israel, to overthrow Par'oh and to lead Israel; for neither of them can I find the slightest vestige of ability or talent in myself." Moshe was not afraid to approach Par'oh, but he was concerned that he might place the B'nei Yisrael at risk for the "woe of a whole people hung on the success of his undertaking." Hashem's answer to Moshe is that He will be there together with Moshe and

that Moshe would then return to this place (Har Sinai) and serve Hashem there. According to HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin, Hashem did not contradict Moshe at this point by telling him that He had discerned that there would never be a Navi who could match the greatness of Moshe, and if he did not take the B'nei Yisrael out of Mitzrayim there could be no one else who could bring about the Redemption.

The second argument also demonstrates Moshe's humility. "And Moshe said to Elokim, 'behold when I come to the B'nei Yisrael and say to them, 'the Hashem of your forefathers sent me to you' and they say to me, 'what is His name?', what shall I say to them?'" Moshe's question is really a statement of his feelings of inadequacy, and that he would not even be able to convince the B'nei Yisrael that Hashem had sent him. Hirsch explains that it is exactly this feeling of inadequacy which Hashem desired. "Just that, in which you see your complete unsuitability for the work, makes you the most suitable for it. ...I require a man who is at the same time the greatest wise man and the greatest humble man. Your marked insufficiency will, for all time, stamp the works which I shall accomplish through you with the sign that what you do could only be accomplished in My mission and by My powers." Hashem wanted an imperfect vessel so that all would know that Hashem, not Moshe, saved the people.

According to Professor Nechama Leibovits, the third challenge to Hashem is a change of approach. Hashem tells Moshe that the B'nei Yisrael will listen to him especially if he speaks primarily to the elders. These would be the people of greatest faith. Moshe then speaks, "and Moshe responded and he said, 'for they will say Hashem did not appear to you.'" Professor Leibovits explains that Moshe's words indicate a new line of defense. "Cassuto in his commentary to Sh'mot remarks that this form of introduction to a speech does not merely connote an answer, but indicates the introduction of a new idea or fresh initiative on the part of the speaker." Moshe's use of the phrase "they will not listen to my voice" is difficult in light of the fact that Hashem already told him that they would listen to him. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the Gemara in Sotah tells us that "respond" and "says" used in the same phrase is said in the Holy language, Hebrew. Moshe was to speak Hebrew to the elders and they would understand that Moshe was speaking the language of Hashem. Only in that way would they believe him.

The fourth challenge indicates that Moshe returns to focus on himself and he pleads a physical inability to communicate properly. "Moshe said to Hashem, 'please, my Lord, I am not a man of words, also not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.'" Here the Torah is referring to a speech defect which caused

Moshe to speak unclearly. Moshe felt that it would be an embarrassment to Hashem to have such an inadequate spokesman as His representative. Moshe was concerned that his garbled speech might indicate some weakness in Hashem.

The fifth and final comment from Moshe is another change in tactic. Moshe now spoke of the idea of embarrassment for his older brother, Aharon, who was already a leader. Moshe was concerned that his appointment over his brother might trigger embarrassment and resentment like that which caused Yosef to be sold into Mitzrayim. Moshe continued, "please my Lor-d, send by the hand of whomever You will send." Moshe's statement challenges Hashem on a different plain, not the inadequacies of Moshe or the B'nei Yisrael, but of the greatness of Aharon. Hashem reacted to Moshe accordingly, "the anger of Hashem burned against Moshe and He said, 'is there not Aharon your brother the Levite? I know that he will surely speak, moreover, behold he is going out to meet you and he will see you and he will rejoice in his heart.'" Hashem would decide Aharon's role, and Aharon would be satisfied.

We are each placed on this Earth with a purpose. Unlike with Moshe, Hashem does not directly tell us what our task is to be. Just as Moshe had doubts of his adequacy to perform his task, we who are even unsure of the exact task are filled with even greater doubts of our abilities. Moshe's deepest fear was that he would begin a task for Hashem and then prove to be incapable of it. What we also fail to grasp is that our task may not be the completion but only the initial steps which someone else will complete. Inaction may be our greatest failing. May we not be afraid to begin our tasks, and may we understand that not completing them is not failure. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

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Raising a Hand to Strike

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

"**A**nd Moshe said to the wicked one (*rasha*), 'Why do you strike your fellow?'" (*Shemot* 2:13). The word translated "strike" (*takeh*) is technically in the future tense. From this our Sages derive that one who simply raises his hand against his neighbor is referred to as a *rasha* (a wicked person), even before actually striking him.

The prohibition of injuring another is biblical, derived from the verse: "He may be given up to forty lashes **but not more**" (*Devarim* 25:3). As is the case for all biblical prohibitions (*lavin*), a transgressor is liable to *malkot* (lashes) for transgressing, unless he is already subject to a financial penalty. Therefore, if someone causes an injury to another and the damage done is minimal (less than a *perutah*), he is liable to *malkot*. We might therefore conclude that someone who simply raises his hand against his neighbor (causing no

damage and earning himself no financial liability) should incur the punishment of lashes. Why then is such a transgressor only referred to as a *rasha* but not lashed?

It is possible that the prooftext cited above is not the real source of the prohibition. Instead, it may be that the prohibition is rabbinic, with the biblical text simply serving as an *asmachta* (support). Even though according to this understanding the transgression of raising one's hand against a neighbor is only rabbinic, someone who does so is referred to as a *rasha*. This status may disqualify him to serve as a witness, and may mean that his oath is not relied upon. Alternatively, it is possible that calling him a *rasha* does not disqualify him as a witness. It may simply mean that we are permitted to refer to him as a *rasha*, which is what Moshe did.

There is another significance to a person being considered a *rasha*. The person whom he is threatening is permitted to report him to the ruling authorities, Jewish or non-Jewish, and he is not considered a *moser* (an informer who turns in a fellow Jew to the authorities in defiance of Jewish law). Furthermore, the person being threatened is permitted to attack his attacker – not physically (as he has not yet been struck) but verbally, by name-calling. For example, he may call the threatening person a *mamzer* (a child born of an adulterous or incestuous union), even though doing so may cause his attacker more harm than the attacker would have caused him had he landed his threatened blow. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"**T**he King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was named Shifra and the second whose name was Puah." (*Shmos* 1:15) When Pharaoh's stargazers told him a Jewish savior would be born, he was frightened and tried to alter the future by directing his own fate. He therefore told the midwives to kill the Hebrew boys. When that ultimately didn't work, he issued the famous decree to throw the boys in the Nile.

The Torah here tells us that he spoke to the midwives, one of whom was named Shifra and the second who was named Puah. There's a difference of opinion in the Gemara in Sota whether these were Yocheved and Miriam or Yocheved and Elisheva, wife of Aharon.

The question is why the Torah found it necessary to interrupt the story to tell us their names. Why not simply tell us what Pharaoh said to them? And if it was key for us to know who they were, why not say, "And Pharaoh called to the midwives, Shifra and Puah"? For a Parsha and a Sefer of Chumash known as "Shmos," the mention of the "names" is obviously

given great significance.

The Midrash in Koheles says on this Posuk, "Says R' Shimon bar Yochai, a good name is more beloved than the Ark of the Covenant because that traveled ahead of the Jews a distance of three days, but a good name travels to the ends of the earth." It continues to praise the concept of a good name, and then offers a number of different reasons that Yocheved and Miriam earned the names Shifra and Puah, all relating to their care and defense of the Jewish children.

The Midrash ends off by saying that a person has three names: one that his parents call him, one that others call him, and one by which he is known in the history books. We can suggest that the name one's parents give represents their hopes and aspirations for the child. The name he is known by to others is how they perceive him from their interactions with him. Ultimately, though, what goes down in the record books is the name he earns through his actions.

When Pharaoh called the midwives, the Torah told us those last names, the ones they earned through their determination to protect their charges; through the care and concern they had which were meaningful for all time. It was important at that point to interject those names so we could identify what gave them the strength to defy his orders.

When one has principles guiding his life, that defines him and molds his character. When one is dedicated to others, he will be selfless because that's who he has become. His name, the one which will go down in history, will not be what anyone else calls him, but rather the name he chooses for himself, by the way he lives his life.

The Chofetz Chaim was called to testify in a secular court. As an introduction, the lawyer wanted to impress upon the judge what a sterling reputation the Chofetz Chaim had.

"Your honor," he said, "They say that one day a guest stole some silver cutlery from this man. The thief ran from the house and the Chofetz Chaim ran after him shouting, "Hefker! Hefker! – These things are ownerless!" He did this so the man would not be considered a thief in the eyes of Jewish law."

The judge sneered at the lawyer and said, "Come on, do you really believe this story?"

The lawyer replied, "Your honor, I don't know whether it's true or not, but I know one thing: They don't say such stories about you or me." ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AHRON LOPIANSKY

TorahWeb

Moshe asks of Hashem, "behold, I come to the people of Israel, and I will tell them that the G-d of their forefathers sent me to them; and they will ask me, 'What is His name?', how shall I respond?

(Shemos 3:13)

This question is highly perplexing. If the words "G-d of your forefathers" is at all meaningful to them, then surely they know His "name"? And is this really the important question they would pose? Wouldn't they focus on trying to get some real evidence that Moshe is genuine and capable of redeeming them, rather than simply finding out His name?

Not only is the request vexing, but the answer is perplexing as well. The name "Eh-keh" is indeed one of the sheimos of Hashem, and yet it appears nowhere else in Tanach besides here. Elsewhere in Tanach the word is used connoting its literal meaning, not as a name of Hashem.

Let us start by understanding the mindset of people before the great events of Yetzias Mitzrayim and Sinai. The idea of a "Great and Mighty Power" was almost universal. Everyone in the world believed in forces that were very powerful, and the question was simply who or what is that force? Every nation had its idols that were considered the "power that be" until another nation bested them, and then the idols of the conquering nations were seen as being the all-powerful forces, and so on. All in all, that is a very logical approach. Just as the nation that wins the battle is seen as being the stronger nation, so too their god is seen as being the stronger god.

The Jewish nation had been enslaved for two centuries, suffering in a most excruciating way. They were slaves, working under torturous conditions, with all sorts of attempts being made to totally eradicate them. Where was the God of their fathers? The only "logical" conclusion was that either He had been bested by the Egyptian gods, or that He was insensitive to Israel's suffering. In either case, He no longer was a viable candidate for being Israel's redeemer, and thus Moshe

Rabbeinu 's powerful question: how does he explain this to the Jewish People?

Hashem replied that in order to understand the God that is ready to redeem them, they must first relearn what G-d is all about. Their "Elokim" model pictured Hashem as a more-powerful, or even all-powerful, entity, but one for whom, any period of "inactivity" would indicate a shortcoming. If the all-powerful is inactive, he either can't or won't act.

But the real essence of Hashem, is "Y-H-W-H", which means "Was, Is, and Will Be." Hashem transcends time, and to begin to understand Hashem one must be able see the entire picture over a long span of time. Just as a two-dimensional picture (e.g. an X-ray) cannot do justice to a three dimensional object, and just as a single image cannot do justice to an entire movie, so too, man's chronologically segmented grasp of events doesn't properly appreciate and capture Hashem's Providence. If anything one sees a distortion.

A farmer who plants a seed, watches it disintegrate, and sees nothing happen all winter, could be mighty disappointed if he lacks the knowledge and foresight to know what will happen in the spring. It is only when we can see all the events in a long sequence that we understand. It is the past, present, and future combined that may yield a more complete understanding of Hashem's hashgacha.

Hashem therefore told Moshe, "Klal Yisroel has knowledge of the past, i.e. the God of their forefathers. They must add the "Eh-keh", i.e. the understanding of the future. Only when they will be able to see the entire continuum in one fell swoop, will they be able to perceive Hashem's providence and benevolence which is to be found even in the present! ©2021 Rabbi A. Lopiansky and TorahWeb.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Insights from Krakow

The Hebrew women are unlike the Egyptian women. They are chayos/experts. Before the midwife comes to them, they have given birth." (Shemos 1:19) Nine is an enigma. At least in regard to "Echad Mi Yode'a" that we sing towards the end of the Pesach seder. Nine, we are told, corresponds to the months of childbirth. But what of it? All the other numbers are linked to things that are special to the Jewish people. The nine-month term of human gestation seems pretty universal. Nothing particularly Jewish about it.

Or maybe there is.

Paroh's edict appeal to the midwives did not reflect any queasiness on his part about killing them more directly. It was the optics of the matter that bothered him. As Ramban (Shemos 1:10) explains, it just wouldn't look very good to wield swords against a people who had been officially invited to dwell in Egypt by one of his predecessors. Better to use a bit of subterfuge.

So there was no outright genocidal edict. He eased his people into infanticide by first placing a corve tax on foreigners. It seemed fair enough. Other countries did the same. Good citizens ought to show their gratitude by participating in public works projects. In time, the voluntary labor became forced labor.

Next, he enlisted the aid of the midwives. If they acted efficiently and discretely enough, even the mothers would not realize what happened.

After that, he subtly encouraged mass participation in killing newborn males by leaking news that Egyptians who acted on their hatred and threw babies into the river would effectively not be prosecuted. Only after all of this -- after people had gotten used to the idea of murder -- did he order that babies be cast into the water.

How, though, did he attempt to convince the

midwives to commit murder? By speaking with great cunning. He told the midwives that they would be doing a great favor to the mothers. These women had more or less accidentally gotten pregnant. Their male children would live lives of harsh servitude. What mother wanted to witness that? Mother and child would both be better off if the baby died in infancy, and would not be destined to a life of misery! The midwives would be angels of mercy, if they could eliminate the unwanted pregnancies while the mothers were still on the birth-stool, before they bonded with their babies.

The midwives countered: These Jewish women are not like our Egyptian ones. They are chayos; they celebrate life! Indeed, they live for their children, and for the future. Their attachment to their children begins well before we arrive on the scene. They love them from the beginnings of their pregnancies.

Who knows nine? Nine are the months of childbirth. To other peoples, the nine months are the months of pregnancy, not of childbirth. But to Jewish women, all nine months are months of childbirth, full of love and concern for the baby-to-be as if he had already been born. (Based on *Chidushei R. Yosef Nechemia (Kornitzer), 1880-1933, Rov of Krakow*) ©2021 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed 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.

