

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l**

### Covenant & Conversation

**G**enesis ends on an almost serene note. Jacob has found his long lost son. The family has been reunited. Joseph has forgiven his brothers. Under his protection and influence the family has settled in Goshen, one of the most prosperous regions of Egypt. They now have homes, property, food, the protection of Joseph and the favour of Pharaoh. It must have seemed one of the golden moments of Abraham's family's history.

Then, as has happened so often since, "There arose a new Pharaoh who did not know Joseph." There was a political climate change. The family fell out of favour. Pharaoh told his advisers: "Look, the Israelite people are becoming too numerous and strong for us" (Ex. 1:9) -- the first time the word "people" is used in the Torah with reference to the children of Israel. "Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase." And so the whole mechanism of oppression moves into operation: forced labour that turns into slavery that becomes attempted genocide.

This is the first intimation in history of what in modern times took the form of the Russian forgery, The Protocols of the Elders of Zion. In the Diaspora, Jews -- powerless -- were often seen as all-powerful. What this usually means, when translated, is: How is it that Jews manage to evade the pariah status we have assigned to them?)

The story is engraved in our memory. We tell it every year, and in summary-form in our prayers, every day. It is part of what it is to be a Jew. Yet there is one phrase that shines out from the narrative: "But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." That, no less than oppression itself, is part of what it means to be a Jew. The worse things get, the stronger we become. Jews are the people who not only survive but thrive in adversity.

Jewish history is not merely a story of Jews enduring catastrophes that might have spelled the end

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated  
by Seth Dombeck  
in memory of his father  
Dovid Chaim ben Shlomo z"l  
Dr. David H. Dombeck  
on his second yartzeit כ"ד טבת

to less tenacious groups. It is that after every disaster, Jews renewed themselves. They discovered some hitherto hidden reservoir of spirit that fuelled new forms of collective self-expression as the carriers of God's message to the world.

Every tragedy begat new creativity. After the division of the kingdom following the death of Solomon came the great literary prophets, Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Out of the destruction of the First Temple and the Babylonian exile came the renewal of Torah in the life of the nation, beginning with Ezekiel and culminating in the vast educational programme brought back to Israel by Ezra and Nehemiah. From the destruction of the Second Temple came the immense literature of rabbinic Judaism, until then preserved mostly in the form of an oral tradition: Mishnah, Midrash and Gemara.

From the Crusades came the Hassidei Ashkenaz, the North European school of piety and spirituality. Following the Spanish expulsion came the mystic circle of Tzefat: Lurianic Kabbalah and all it inspired by way of poetry and prayer. From East European persecution and poverty came the Hassidic movement and its revival of grass-roots Judaism through a seemingly endless flow of story and song. And from the worst tragedy of all in human terms, the Holocaust, came the rebirth of the state of Israel, the greatest collective Jewish affirmation of life in more than two thousand years.

It is well known that the Chinese ideogram for "crisis" also means "opportunity". Any civilisation that can see the blessing within the curse, the fragment of light within the heart of darkness, has within it the capacity to endure. Hebrew goes one better. The word for crisis, mashber, also means "a child-birth chair." Written into the semantics of Jewish consciousness is the idea that the pain of hard times is a collective form of the contractions of a woman giving birth. Something new is being born. That is the mindset of a people of whom it can be said that "the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread."

Where did it come from, this Jewish ability to turn weakness into strength, adversity into advantage, darkness into light? It goes back to the moment in which our people received its name, Israel. It was then, as Jacob wrestled alone at night with an angel, that as dawn broke his adversary begged him to let him go. "I

will not let you go until you bless me", said Jacob. That is the source of our peculiar, distinctive obstinacy. We may have fought all night. We may be tired and on the brink of exhaustion. We may find ourselves limping, as did Jacob. Yet we will not let our adversary go until we have extracted a blessing from the encounter. This turned out to be not a minor and temporary concession. It became the basis of his new name and our identity. Israel, the people who "wrestled with God and man and prevailed", is the nation that grows stronger with each conflict and catastrophe.

I was reminded of this unusual national characteristic by an article that appeared in the British press in October 2015. Israel at the time was suffering from a wave of terrorist attacks that saw Palestinians murdering innocent civilians in streets and bus stations throughout the country. It began with these words: "Israel is an astonishing country, buzzing with energy and confidence, a magnet for talent and investment -- a cauldron of innovation." It spoke of its world-class excellence in aerospace, clean-tech, irrigation systems, software, cyber-security, pharmaceuticals and defence systems. (Luke Johnson, 'Animal Spirits: Israel and its tribe of risk-taking entrepreneurs,' Sunday Times, 4 October 2015.)

"All this", the writer went on to say, "derives from brainpower, for Israel has no natural resources and is surrounded by hostile neighbours." The country is living proof of "the power of technical education, immigration and the benefits of the right sort of military service." Yet this cannot be all, since Jews have consistently overachieved, wherever they were and whenever they were given the chance. He goes through the various suggested explanations: the strength of Jewish families, their passion for education, a desire for self-employment, risk-taking as a way of life, and even ancient history. The Levant was home to the world's first agricultural societies and earliest traders. Perhaps, then, the disposition to enterprise was written, thousands of years ago, into Jewish DNA. Ultimately, though, he concludes that it has to do with "culture and communities".

A key element of that culture has to do with the Jewish response to crisis. To every adverse circumstance, those who have inherited Jacob's sensibilities insist: "I will not let you go until you bless me." That is how Jews, encountering the Negev, found ways of making the desert bloom. Seeing a barren, neglected landscape elsewhere, they planted trees and forests. Faced with hostile armies on all their borders, they developed military technologies they then turned to peaceful use. War and terror forced them to develop medical expertise and world-leading skills in dealing with the aftermath of trauma. They found ways of turning every curse into a blessing. The historian Paul Johnson, as always, put it eloquently:

"Over 4,000 years the Jews proved themselves

not only great survivors but extraordinarily skilful in adapting to the societies among which fate had thrust them, and in gathering whatever human comforts they had to offer. No people has been more fertile in enriching poverty or humanising wealth, or in turning misfortune to creative account." (Paul Johnson, *The History of the Jews*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, 58.)

There is something profoundly spiritual as well as robustly practical about this ability to transform the bad moments of life into a spur to creativity. It is as if, deep within us were a voice saying, "You are in this situation, bad though it is, because there is a task to perform, a skill to acquire, a strength to develop, a lesson to learn, an evil to redeem, a shard of light to be rescued, a blessing to be uncovered, for I have chosen you to give testimony to humankind that out of suffering can come great blessings if you wrestle with it for long enough and with unshakeable faith."

In an age in which people of violence are committing acts of brutality in the name of the God of compassion, the people of Israel are proving daily that this is not the way of the God of Abraham, the God of life and the sanctity of life. And whenever we who are a part of that people lose heart, and wonder when it will ever end, we should recall the words: "The more they were oppressed, the more they increased and the more they spread." A people of whom that can be said can be injured, but can never be defeated. God's way is the way of life. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

#### RABBI BEREL WEIN

### Wein Online

**T**he Torah leaves us basically unprepared for its description of the events that are recorded for us in this week's parsha. When we last left the family of Israel at the conclusion of last week's parsha of Vayechi, the Jews found themselves comfortable, affluent, protected and settled well in the land of Goshen.

The Torah does not describe to us the process by which this situation so radically changed into becoming a slave state for the Jews. It only tells us of a new king who didn't know Yosef and, for reasons not explicitly mentioned in the Torah, became a hater and persecutor of the Jews.

The Torah seems to indicate that this is almost a natural state of affairs -- to be expected. The Egyptian exile begins on a high note, deteriorates into abject sorrow and attempted genocide and ends with miraculous redemption. The Torah does not dwell upon any motives for the occurrence of this pattern of events. What did the Jews do wrong? Why was the Pharaoh such a hater? What were the economic or social factors

of the time that allowed for such a dramatic worsening of the Jewish position in Egypt?

The Torah addresses none of these issues. It is almost as if the Torah wishes us to understand that these things happen blindly in human history. And, particularly in Jewish history, that the attempts of historians and sociologists to explain these irrational events and behavior patterns are really useless.

As has been often pointed out, all subsequent Jewish exiles -- Babylonia, Spain, France, Germany, Eastern Europe, the Moslem Middle East -- all seem to eerily conform to this original Egyptian template. As usual the Torah leaves us with more questions than it provides answers for. In effect, that is why the Torah is called the book of human life.

We are also unprepared to recognize the savior of Israel in the person of Moses. We are told how he was miraculously saved from the crocodiles of the Nile by the daughter of the Pharaoh and raised in the royal court. He sympathizes with the brutalized Jewish slaves, defends them, and is forced to flee from Egypt.

We hear nothing regarding Moses for the next sixty years until he reemerges as a shepherd in Midian, married to the daughter of Yitro, the local religious chief who, at this time, is still a pagan. Hardly the resume' that one would expect for the leader of Israel, the greatest of all prophets and the teacher of all human kind.

Where did his holiness and greatness stem from, how was it developed, who were his mentors and what were his experiences over those long decades of separation from his people? The Torah gives us no clue or answer to these questions. It effectively points out that greatness oftentimes comes from unexpected sources and from people and leaders who operate outside of the usual establishment circles.

All of life is a mystery and certainly the Jewish story remains in its base an inexplicable one. This sets the stage for everything else that will now follow in the Torah. It is why the Jewish people, when accepting the Torah pledge to God that "we will do and then perhaps try to understand," if we wish to understand first we will never come to do. The Divine hand guides us but it is never subject to our rational thoughts and explanations.

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#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

"A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). Why is Joseph, the towering personality of the last four portions of the Book of Genesis, not considered the fourth patriarch of Israel? After all, he receives a double share

of the inheritance through Manasseh and Ephraim, the two tribes who emanate from his loins – and it is he who saves his family, and thus the Jewish people, from starvation and oblivion.

Moreover, why does Moses emerge as the savior and redeemer of the Book of Exodus? What catapults this prince of Egypt to such an exalted position of Jewish leadership when he was raised in Pharaoh's palace, sports an Egyptian name (Moses means "son" in Egyptian) and seems totally disconnected from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Let us begin with Moses. I believe it was the great Professor Nechama Leibowitz, of blessed memory, who pointed out that Moses is the great fighter against injustice, whether it is perpetrated by Egyptian (gentile) against Hebrew (Exodus 2:11), by Hebrew against Hebrew, or by Midianite (gentile) against Midianite (gentile).

When we remember how God declares that He chose and loved Abraham because he would teach later generations to "keep God's way by doing acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice," and how in this manner, "all the nations of the world will be blessed through him" (Genesis 18:18,19), we realize that by fighting injustice in all three of these spheres Moses is expressing a direct line of continuity with Abraham, the first Hebrew and the recipient of God's covenant.

However, there is one category that is absent from Moses's list: an injustice performed by a Jew against a gentile. Clearly, the Bible understands the necessity of acting against injustice no matter what the ethnic profile of either oppressor or victim, since the source of Moses's commitment to strike out against injustice – in addition to whatever stories about Abraham he may have heard from his biological mother, Jochebed – was the example of his adoptive mother. This Egyptian princess flouted the cruel law of her father Pharaoh, risking her life, to save the Hebrew baby floating in an ark on the Nile River.

It is precisely this message of universality which the Bible expresses in the very first of Moses's acts against injustice, when he slays the Egyptian taskmaster beating the Hebrew: "...And he [Moses] saw an Egyptian personage [ish] beating a Hebrew personage [ish] from amongst his [Moses's] brothers. And he looked at that one [the oppressor] and at the other one [the victim], and when he realized that there was no [real] personage [ish], he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11,12).

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, explains that the Hebrew word "ish" is the highest category of the various Hebrew terms for "man." And, used to refer to both the Egyptian and the Hebrew, the word certainly conveys universal application. Moses was familiar with both Egyptian and Hebrew societies and recognized both the oppressor

and the oppressed as having been important personages in their respective environments and communities.

But now that they had been thrust together as oppressor and victim, when Moses looked at each of them, he realized that each had lost his elevated status of "persona"; the very act of oppression demeans and demotes both perpetrator and sufferer, robs each of his status as having been created in the image of the Divine; there was longer an "ish" amongst them. And this would seem to be irrespective of who is the Egyptian and who is the Hebrew. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**fter being raised in the Egyptian palace, Moses goes into the field and sees an Egyptian smiting a Jew. In the words of the Torah, "He looked this way and that way, and when he saw there was no man [ish], he smote the Egyptian" (Exodus 2:12).

Taken literally, it seems that Moses looked to see if anyone was watching. With the coast clear, Moses defends the Jew. But this interpretation is difficult because, in the midst of a busy working field, it's doubtful that no one was there.

The Netziv, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, in his *Ha'amek Davar*, reads this phrase differently. In his view, Moses, seeing a Jew beaten, looked to see if any Egyptian would stand up for him. Moses looks this way and that way but sees no one who seems to care. In the absence of Egyptian justice, Moses acts. Things are not so different today. All too frequently, the world is silent as Jews are attacked.

Rav Yaakov Zvi Mecklenberg, in his *Haktav v'Hakabbalah*, has another take. Moses knew that no Egyptian would come forward. He looked, however, to see whether any Jew would care enough to save his own brother. When no Jew did, Moses killed the Egyptian. Once again, this dynamic plays out today. Tragically, too often, Jews don't respond to the suffering of their fellow Jews.

There is yet another possible interpretation. Moses was raised in an Egyptian home but nursed by his biological Jewish mother. As a consequence, perhaps Moses was always unsure who he really was. When seeing an Egyptian smiting a Jew, he looked within himself to ascertain whether he should help the Egyptian or defend the Jew. The meaning of "he looked this way and that way" is that he looked within himself to see who he really was, Egyptian or Jewish.

When he fully grasped that he had not firmly established his identity, he made a decision: he smote the Egyptian, symbolically eliminating a part of himself, declaring unequivocally that he was a Jew.

The Talmud tells of an aging man in a polygamous society who decides to marry a second,

younger wife. Both wives vie for his affection. "You're graying," says his wife of many years. "Why not age maturely?" As she speaks, she plucks his black hair and says, "Look in the mirror, and you'll see you're all gray." The younger wife, not to be denied, declares, "You're old in age but young in vigor." As she speaks, she plucks out his gray hair, telling him, "Look into the mirror, and you'll see your hair is all black." In the end, looking into the mirror, the man finds himself absolutely bald (Baba Kama 60b).

At a certain point, it's crucial for each of us to stop wavering and to stand up and identify ourselves boldly and clearly. When we find ourselves in a place where there is no person (ish), as so many of us often do, it's crucial that each of us steps up as Moses did to make the difference. To paraphrase our rabbis, in a place where there is no ish, stand up and be one (Ethics of the Sages 2:5). ©2023 *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 JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

### **Migdal Ohr**

**"L**et us deal wisely with him [Klal Yisrael] lest he multiply... and fight against us and drive us from the land." (Shmos 1:10) It was nothing less than savage butchery, but Pharaoh could not describe his proposed plan in that way. He understood that were he to simply order his executioners to kill the Jews, they would balk; the people would be stunned and repulsed, and Pharaoh would come off looking like a maniacal demon.

He had to be smart about it. Pharaoh would begin by levying a tax on the Jews. Certainly, that was understandable. They were immigrants who came from another land, and it was common to tax such people. Then he would tell the midwives to kill the children at birth, when even the mothers wouldn't realize what happened. Eventually, he would let it be known to the populace that if anyone took a Jewish child and threw him in the river, the palace wouldn't prosecute.

The plan worked, and people started to seek out Jewish children. However, it was a short-lived decree. It could be, says the Ramban, that Pharaoh's daughter, after finding Moshe, convinced Pharaoh to rescind it, or else once word got out that it had started with Pharaoh, he had to cancel it to save face.

This was not a battle that would be fought head-on, but surreptitiously, so that the true hideousness of the plan would not be revealed. This was the sort of "chochma, wisdom" and psychological manipulation that Pharaoh used to dehumanize the Jews and get people to persecute them or worse. You will note that he was not the last despot to utilize such misdirection. It worked then and it works now.

And there is one more factor that worked in favor of Pharaoh's plan. He used the words, "Let us be wise," when discussing his plan. He phrased his goals in logical, even complimentary terms. "We need to protect the infrastructure of our country from the immigrants." "We need to plan reasonable remediation efforts to ensure all our citizens thrive." "We have to be smart about the way we proceed."

It sounded wonderful, except that he proposed slavery and murder. He wasn't being magnanimous and thoughtful, preparing for the future. Pharaoh was creating a narrative to justify his heinous plans. And we may all do this at some point.

When we want to do something, but the Torah tells us not to, the Yetzer Hara writes a script that couches it in glorious terms, perhaps even convincing us that we're doing a great mitzvah. That's when we need to remember this lesson, that words can be used to disguise motives even from ourselves. We need to be aware and alert not to be fooled and to look at our actions for what they truly are.

On the bright side, we can use this knowledge to portray Torah, Judaism, and serving Hashem gloriously and it will have a similar effect, making people desire it and making them feel good about it. Sadly, the world today ridicules people of faith, but if we stand strong and proud, we will have the last laugh.

*The Ponevizher Rav, R' Yosef Kahaneman z"l, was known as an amazing fundraiser, a world-class Talmid Chacham, and a man of keen insight. Once, he approached a wealthy individual for a donation to build a school.*

*"I am not interested in your values," said the man, "but I have national pride. I will donate a sizable sum to your school if you guarantee me that none of the students will wear a kippa." People were stunned when Rav Kahaneman agreed to the man's outrageous terms.*

*Shortly thereafter, with the funds from this benefactor, the Rav opened a school for girls. ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

### 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?" (*Shemos* 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 (*Javin*), 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 AVI SHAFRAN

### Cross-Currents

**T**he account of Moshe's being placed in the river, discovered by bas Par'oh and raised in royal surroundings would seem to be of no import regarding the main narrative of Shemos -- Moshe's killing the Mitzri, fleeing as a result to Midian and being charged by Hashem with his mission.

Ibn Ezra, though, suggests that it is very much part of the larger story. He writes that "Perhaps Hashem arranged things so that Moshe would grow up in a royal house and his spirit would thereby be exalted" and he would "not possess a base spirit used to being in the house of slaves."

That, he continues, was necessary for Moshe to be able to kill the Mitzri and intercede to help Yisro's daughters (and, I might also suggest, to be able to receive *nevu'ah*, which requires a state of contentment).

Which makes for a delicious irony: Par'oh's decree to kill baby boys is what required baby Moshe to be placed in the river, which resulted in his being raised as a royal, which allowed him to become the agent of Klal Yisrael's geulah, the very thing Par'oh had sought to undermine.

"Many thoughts are in a man's heart, but it is Hashem's plan that will persevere" (Mishlei 19:21). It has been said that the intent of that pasuk is that those very thoughts of man can be the vehicle for the fruition of Hashem's plan.

We see that not only in Par'oh's ultimately self-undermining decree but in the narrative that ended Sefer Beraishis. As Yosef reassured his brothers about their plotting against him, which resulted in his elevation in Mitzrayim and his becoming the provider of food to the the nation and his family: "Indeed, you intended evil against me, [but] Hashem designed it for good, in order to bring about what is at present to keep a great populace alive."

We read these parshios after Chanukah, on the path to the next Jewish holiday, Purim. There couldn't be anything more Purim-centric than the irony of how best-laid plans can themselves bring about the opposite of the plotters's wish: "Hashem's plan." ©2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah displays the true potential of the Jewish people and their unlimited ability. The prophet Yeshaya opens with a descriptive expression about the Jewish exile and exodus from Egypt. He states, "Those who are coming will strike roots as Yaakov and will blossom and bud as Yisroel." (27:6) These words refer to the drastic contradistinction between the Jewish people who struck roots in Egypt and those who merited the exodus. Yeshaya says that they entered with the identity of Yaakov and left as Yisroel. This change of name typified the spiritual ascent of the Jewish people which began from the downtrodden status of the galus Jew, Yaakov, and resulted with the supreme status of Yisroel. These names truly reflect the incredible spiritual growth of the Jewish people who developed from a nearly assimilated group rising to the lofty kingdom of priests.

In this week's parsha the S'forno reveals to us a significant dimension regarding the Jewish people's conduct in Egypt. In describing the Jewish population explosion in Egypt the Torah says, "And the children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied in swarms and proliferated and became overpowering in excessive measures." (Sh'mos 1:7) The S'forno takes note of this peculiar expression "multiplying in swarms" which seems to compare the Jewish people to swarms of insects and crawling creatures. He explains that this comparison refers to the prevalent mannerisms of the

Jewish people in those days. They fell prey to Egyptian culture and were transformed into of a free thinking, undisciplined race. This comment reflects the words of Chazal which indicate that during the early years in Egypt the Jews roamed the streets of Egypt. They preoccupied themselves with Egyptian practices and freely participated in Egypt's immoral style of amusement and enjoyment.

The S'forno, in his commentary to previous passages, informs us that this severe spiritual descent transpired only after the passing of the initial pious group who entered Egypt. Once the devout were out of sight, the Jewish people began viewing Egypt as their homeland and became acclimated to her alien culture. This, however, was the description of their earliest era. Miraculously, after years of heavy servitude and torturous slavery, this same Jewish people emerged as a nation of sanctity and dignity, each worthy of the highest level of prophecy. At this point they qualified for the revelation of Hashem at Har Sinai and were temporarily elevated to the spiritual level of the angels. The prophet Yeshaya reflects upon this early experience to demonstrate the Jewish people's true potential. From it we learn that even after digressing for an extended period to the level of swarming creatures the Jewish people's potential remained that of the angels themselves.

The prophet Yeshaya continues and predicts that this pattern will reoccur amongst the Jewish nation. He begins with sharp words of reprimand to the ten tribes of Israel and calls upon them to remove every trace of idolatry from their kingdom. He warns them and says, "Woe unto you, crown of arrogance; drunkards of Efraim. The splendor of your glory will be likened to a withering bud." (28:1) This refers to the imminent experience of destruction and exile soon to befall the ten tribes. Yeshaya then continues and turns to the remaining Jewish segment, the Judean kingdom, and blames them for following a similar path. To them Yeshaya says, "And they too were negligent through wine and strayed through intoxication...for all of their tables were replete with refuse without any remaining space." (27:7,8) These passages refer to the sinful plunge of the Judean empire into idolatry. Although this repulsive practice originated from the ten tribes it eventually took hold amongst the Judean kingdom and they also seriously strayed from the proper path.

But, Yeshaya inserts here some encouraging words and says, "On that day Hashem will be a crown of splendor and a diadem of glory for the remnant of His people." (28:5) The Radak (ad loc.) explains Yeshaya's reason for expressing these comforting words in the midst of his heavy rebuke. Radak sees these words as a reference to the Judean kingdom's future fortune, meriting one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history. In their near future, the mighty King Sanherev would attempt to engage in a heavy war

against the Jewish people. In response to this Hashem would perform an awesome miracle and rescue His people without suffering one casualty. This miracle would result from an unprecedented campaign by King Chizkiyahu to proliferate Torah knowledge throughout the Judean kingdom. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94b) records that during this illustrious era every single person -- man or woman, boy or girl -- was proficient in the most complicated laws of ritual cleanliness. This very same kingdom who, one generation earlier was so heavily involved in idolatry, would soon cleanse itself from all sin and become totally immersed in Torah study and rituals. Through this enormous comeback, the prophet demonstrated the unlimited potential of the Jewish people. Although they may seriously digress in their spiritual ways, they do remain capable of a perfect reversal. Yeshaya stressed the phenomena that over the span of but one generation the Jewish people went from total spiritual bankruptcy to almost unprecedented perfection, meriting one of the greatest miracles ever seen.

In this spirit, Yeshaya brings the haftorah to a close and relays Hashem's heartwarming statement to our patriarch Yaakov. Hashem says, "Now, don't be embarrassed Yaakov, and don't blush from shame because when your children will see My hand in their midst they will sanctify My name... and exalt the Hashem of Israel." (29: 22, 23) The undertone here is that in the future the Jewish people will severely stray from the proper path. Their actions will be so inexcusable that their beloved patriarch Yaakov will be embarrassed and ashamed of them. But Hashem reminds Yaakov to focus on the unlimited potential of his children, the Jewish people. Although they can and do stray from the path, this is only when Hashem conceals Himself from them. In spiritual darkness, they lose sight of true values and, being amongst the nations of the world, adopt foreign values and customs. But the moment Hashem returns to them with His open hand, they will regain their true status of greatness. They will quickly return to Hashem and follow His perfect ways, sanctifying and exalting Him with their every action. Hashem told our patriarch Yaakov to overlook his children's present spiritual level and to focus on their potential greatness. The time will surely arrive when Yaakov, after all the long, hard years of servitude and exile will merit Hashem's revelation. Undoubtedly the response to this will be an immediate return to the lofty levels of spirituality and Yaakov, now Yisroel, will praise and glorify Hashem's name for eternity. © 2013 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

**RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## Moshe's Birth

**T**he birth of Moshe takes place just after Par'oh had decreed that all Jewish male children born that year would be thrown into the Nile River. The

Torah tells us: "A man went from the House of Levi and took a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son, and she saw that he was good and she hid him for three months. She was no longer able to hide him, so she took for him a reed basket and smeared it with clay and tar; she placed the boy into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the river. His sister stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him. Par'oh's daughter went down to bathe by the river and her maidens walked along the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant and she took it. She opened it and saw him, the boy, and behold the youth was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrew boys.'"

Rashi quotes a Midrash that says that when Par'oh gave this decree, Amram and Yocheved, Moshe's parents, separated so that they would not have to kill any male children she might have. Miriam, their oldest child, complained that Par'oh had only decreed against male children, but her parents were decreeing against even female children. The Kli Yakar explains that the word "vayeilech, and he went," is the language of divorce. Furthermore, the word "vayikach, and he took," is the language of marriage. The Ramban appears to disagree with Rashi, indicating that this "man" chose to disregard Par'oh's decree and specifically went out to marry in order to produce male children in defiance of Par'oh. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin points out that the Torah does not specify Moshe's parents' names, but says "a man" and "a daughter." This is because their reunion, pregnancy, and birth were a decree from Hashem. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the Torah wished to indicate that any man within Yisrael was eligible to be the father of "the leader of all prophets." What made Amram special was that he was head of the Sanhedrin (the Rabbinic Court System) and was a man who feared sin. All "daughters" of Yisrael were eligible to be the mother of prophets, yet Yocheved was chosen because she was a midwife, one of the women who saved and hid the male children who were born.

Our Rabbis explored the phrase "that he was good" from several different approaches. Rashi quotes from Gemara Sotah, that when Moshe was born, the house was filled with light, which is associated with Torah. The Ramban explains that Yocheved saw that good would come from this baby, and that a miracle would save him from Par'oh. The Bal HaTurim points out that the Hebrew letters that comprise the words "ki tov hu, that he was good," contain five letters that have crowns when written in the Torah. Here this indicated that Moshe was to receive the Five Books of the Torah. The Or HaChaim says that the Midrashim about the light in the house and that Moshe was born already circumcised are not the simple understanding of the words (p'shat). The greater likelihood is that Moshe

was born pre-mature in the sixth month, as were many children born to the Jewish slaves. The Gemara indicates that a baby could be viable if born in the seventh month or the ninth month. This meant that Moshe's survival was questionable. Here, because his mother saw that he was viable (good), even though born early, she then hid him for three months, at which time the Egyptian guards would have assumed that she had given birth. Had she seen that he was not viable (good), she would have turned him over earlier and complied with Par'oh's decree. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that Yocheved was not concerned that Moshe would be discovered by the Egyptians, seeking to uncover what had become of the pregnancy. She was more concerned that people would begin to play with her son and would cause him to giggle or crow out loud.

Yocheved placed him in a basket that was sealed on the outside by tar and on the inside by clay. The Hebrew word for this basket, "teiva," is found only one other time in the Torah, namely, when it refers to the teiva of Noach. There we also see that the teiva was sealed, but with tar on the inside and on the outside. This difference is attributed to the fact that the waters of the Flood were boiling hot, thus requiring the double seal of tar. Moshe's teiva was in the reeds of the Nile River and only needed to be sealed from normal river water, not boiling water. Rashi explains that Yocheved did not put the smelly tar on the inside because Moshe, a Tzaddik, should not have to suffer the smell. Interestingly, the word used here for tar is zefet, whereas by Noach it is kofeir. Kofeir is related to kaparah, atonement, indicating that those outside and inside the teiva of Noach both needed atonement for their sins. This would explain why the kofeir was on the outside and the inside, in spite of the smell.

According to the Midrash that said that Amram and Yocheved's daughter, Miriam, criticized their decision to separate, Miriam had also prophesied that the child born of their future union would be the Savior of the Jewish People. She was certain that Moshe would be saved though she was unsure of how this was to happen. She watched him in the reeds to see how he would be saved. She knew that Par'oh had declared that all Jewish male children that were born should be thrown into the river. This was on the advice of his sorcerers who declared that Par'oh's dream indicated that the Savior of the Jews would be born during that year. Upon later advice, Par'oh that very day had declared that even male Egyptian children who were born would also be thrown in the Nile. The Torah tells us that Par'oh's daughter went to bathe in the Nile, but a Midrash interprets this cleansing as her wish to wash away the idol-worship of her father. HaRav Sorotzkin implies that the use of "hayeled, the boy" indicates that she may have recognized that this Jewish child was the Savior of Par'oh's dream, and she

understood that he was destined to bring a new understanding of Hashem into the world. She saved Moshe, both as an act of discarding the idols of her father and of accepting upon herself to follow this Savior when he would lead the B'nei Yisrael out of Egypt and into the desert to receive the Torah. Her name is recorded as Bitya or Batya, meaning the daughter of G-d. Par'oh named her that, thinking himself to be a G-d. More appropriately she was named that because she understood the difference between the false gods of Egypt and the One True Hashem.

It is clear from the Torah and the Midrashim which accompany it that Moshe's birth was miraculous and destined by Hashem. Hashem knew that it would take time for Moshe to develop the midot, the characteristics of righteousness, that he would need in order to lead the people. Every event in Moshe's life gave him the opportunity to develop those qualities, just as every event in our own lives helps us to grow and perfect our behavior. May we enjoy success in that endeavor. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

#### RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

### Weekly Dvar

**W**hen 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 Y. Kamenetzky & torah.org

