

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd it was, because (or when) the midwives feared G-d, [that] He made houses for them” (Shemos 1:21). What were these "houses?"

Rashi tells us that they were "houses of Kehuna (the Priesthood) and of Leviya (the Levites) and of Malchus (the royalty); Kehuna and Leviya from Yocheved and Malchus from Miriam." Since Aharon was the first Kohain, and all Kohanim are his descendents, it is obvious how this "reward" manifested itself, as Aharon was Yocheved's son. The Talmud (Sotah 11b) says that Dovid Hamelech is a descendent of Miriam, so this is how houses of Malchus were a reward for her. Besides, since Miriam was Yocheved's daughter, this can be considered to be from both of them. However, the Talmud only attributes the houses of Malchus to Miriam, not to Yocheved, and does not mention that Moshe (Yocheved's youngest son) is himself considered a king (see Shemos Rabbah 48:4). While this is not really problematic, considering Moshe's status as a Levi being part of the reward for fearing G-d might be.

Yocheved married Amram, who was a Levi, so her male descendents would have been Leviim no matter what, even if she hadn't exhibited such bravery. All others that descended from Levi were also considered Leviim, not just those that came from Moshe. Aharon was "upgraded" to the status of Kohain, and being the first Kohain, it could rightly be said that the House of Kohanim came from him. But how could it be said that Yocheved merited getting the house (or houses) of Leviim if her son was "just" another Levi, and would have been anyway?

One possible answer might have been that Rashi doesn't mean that there were three houses, i.e. (1) Kohanim, (2) Leviim and (3) Malchus, but rather two, i.e. (1) Kohanim and Leviim and (2) Malchus, with the first coming from Yocheved and the second from Miriam. And, in fact, the Sifray (Behaalosecha 78) only mentions these 2 (without mentioning Leviya at all). Leviya is also omitted in Shemos Rabbah (48:4), Midrash Tehillim (118:8) and Targum Yonasan. (Rashi's proof text only mentions Kehuna and Malchus as well, although its purpose was to show that they are called "houses," and need not mention all 3 to prove the point.) Since Kohanim are often described as being

Leviim in Tanach ("Hakohanim Haleviim," see Yevamos 86b), it would not be difficult to explain Rashi as lumping the two together into one "house." If this were true, then when the Talmud (Sotah 11b), which Rashi attributes as his source, specifies that "Kehuna and Leviya" refer to Aharon and Moshe, it must mean Moshe's stint as the Kohain Gadol (during the first 7 days of the Mishkan), as his being a Levi is irrelevant.

Nevertheless, the simpler reading of the Talmud is that Moshe was included to show that Leviya came from Yocheved, indicating that it was considered a separate "house." Additionally, Shemos Rabbah (1:17) specifically mentions "the house of Levi," as does the Targum Yerushalmi. Midrash Hagadol does as well, indicating that Moshe was a Levi and referencing Tehillim's "House of Aharon" and "House of Levi" (135:19-20). We would therefore need to explain how Yocheved was "rewarded" with the "House of Levi" if Moshe (and his sons) were Leviim because Amram was a Levi, whether or not Yocheved had defied Paro.

The Maharsho suggests that "after Yocheved was divorced from her husband, Amram, she merited getting remarried to him, who was a Levi, meaning that she gave birth to Moshe who was a Levi." In other words, if not for her merits of defying Paro, she may not have remarried Amram and given birth to Moshe. However, as the "Toras Hakenaos" points out, Yocheved was actually pregnant with Moshe 3 months prior to their remarriage, so it would not have affected Moshe being born (and being a Levi). It could be suggested that it was Moshe's birth that she merited, even if it had nothing to do with her getting remarried, but (as the Avodas Dovid says) getting "houses" implies an additional status given to her offspring, not getting the additional offspring itself.

The Toras Hakenaos tries to answer the original question by saying that since G-d knows everything in advance, it is not difficult to suggest that He arranged for Yocheved to marry Amram the Levi in the first place since she would, years later, defy Paro due to her fear of and allegiance to G-d. I am quite uncomfortable with this approach, especially in light of the Talmud (Sotah 2a) saying that G-d can't set up couples 40 days before conception if the "match" is based on how righteous each are, despite G-d knowing how each will turn out. Amazingly, the Toras Hakenaos himself (ibid) brings additional proofs that "even though

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G-d knows the future he does not decide people's fate based on His [prior] knowledge."

There is a halachic anomaly that occurs regarding "pidyon haben," redeeming the firstborn son from a Kohain (Y"D 305:18). Normally, if the maternal grandfather is either a Kohain or a Levi, no "pidyon" is needed. Even if the father is not Jewish, if the grandfather was a Levi it is unnecessary. However, if the maternal grandfather was a Kohain, then a "pidyon haben" is required. Since every Kohain is also a Levi, why doesn't the daughter of a Kohain have the same "petur" (reason for it not applying)? Reb Chaim Brisker (Hilchos Isuray Biya 15:9) explains that a Kohain is not a "Levi plus," with the holiness (etc.) of a Kohain added onto his being a Levi. Rather, when Aharon and his sons became Kohanim, they lost their "Levi" status, as it was replaced by their being a "Kohain." Therefore, once this mother-to-be lost her status of being a "Kohain" she is not still considered a "Levi," thus necessitating the "pidyon."

When Moshe kept refusing to be G-d's messenger to take the Children of Israel out of Egypt, G-d finally said that his brother Aharon, "the Levi," would join him and do the speaking for him (Shemos 4:14-16). Why did G-d point out that Aharon was a Levi? "Because he was supposed to remain a Levi, and not become a Kohain, and I (G-d) would have had the Kehuna come from you (Moshe), [but] it will no longer be that way; instead, he will be the Kohain and you a Levi" (Rashi on 4:14). Rashi then brings a proof text showing that Moshe's children were considered Leviim.

It is possible that since Moshe was supposed to be the Kohain (and in fact served as one in the Mishkan), his status was therefore changed from being a Levi to being a Kohain. When he lost that status, as manifested by his children not being Kohanim, it wasn't just the "extra part" of Kehuna that was taken away, but all of it (since being a Kohain is not really a subset of being a Levi). Rather, he had lost his "Leviya" by being designated a Kohain, and should have not have been considered a Levi again when he lost it. Reverting back to being a Levi (and his children being considered Leviim) may have occurred only in Yocheved's merit. Rashi had to bring the proof text to show this, as otherwise how would we know that Moshe retained his status of being a Levi?

Yocheved was in fact given "houses of Kehuna and Leviya;" Kehuna through Aharon when he was made the first Kohain, and Leviya through Moshe when his descendents were allowed to still be considered Leviim even after Moshe was no longer considered a Kohain. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

Since the expulsion of the seven-to-eight thousand residents of Gush Katif at the behest of the Israeli Government by the IDF and the Israeli Police Force two summers ago, an expression of the then Governmental policy of unilateral disengagement, and ideological battle has raged within the Religious Zionist Camp regarding the right (or even obligation) of an Israeli soldier to refuse to carry out military orders if they conflict with his conscience or religious standards. When, if ever, does individual conscience override governmental authority? Will anarchy not reign supreme, and Central governmental authority fall by the wayside, if every soldier of the IDF decides which orders are proper for him to carry out and when the authority of his Talmudic Academy overrides the authority of his army commander? This is a question with enormous ramifications for the future of our Jewish State. Some of these issues are touched upon by our Biblical portion of Shemot and are worthy of investigation.

The Book of Exodus opens with the cataclysmic difference in the manner in which the descendants of Jacob-Israel are treated by a tyrannical Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph." The Egyptians embittered the lives of the Israelites with back-breaking slave labor - and they even attempted to commit genocide against the Jews by killing off the male babies: "The King of Egypt told (or ordered) the Hebrew midwives (or the midwives of the Hebrews), 'When you bring about the birth of the Hebrew women and you examine the birth- stool, if it is a male child you must slay him and if it is a female child, she may live.'" (Exodus 1:13-17).

The classical commentary Rashi interprets these mid-wives to be Hebrew women, whom Pharaoh wished to diabolically co-opt into his service against their own people, as an ancient form of "Kapos," if you will. The arch-anti Semites, like Hitler and Stalin, always attempted, by means of bribery, extortion and blackmail - to utilize Jews against the Jews in their attempt to exterminate our nation.

The Abarbanel and R. Shmuel David Luzzato, on the other hand, take the phrase to mean the Egyptian midwives of the Hebrew women - and since "These (Egyptian) mid-wives feared the Lord, they refused to follow the instructions of Pharaoh and allowed the (male) babies to live" (Gen 1:18). These true heroines apparently understood that, despite the

totalitarian laws of a Pharaoh despot of Egypt, there was a higher ethical law of the Creator of humanity in His Divine image to whom one had to submit. This is the first case of civil disobedience in history.

They had a magnificent model, none other than Bitya, the princess daughter of Pharaoh himself. Baby Moses had been concealed in an ark (Teyva, the very same word used for the boat which had rescued humanity in the earlier days of Noah) left floating along the Nile; when the Princess of Egypt came down to the river to bathe, and saw this ark on the waters, she sent her maid-servant and - contrary to her father's orders - rescued the Hebrew child. She names him Moses, or son (in Egyptian), because since she drew him forth from the waters of the Nile - and by so doing certainly risked her life in the face of the wrath of Pharaoh should he learn of her willful and traitorous deed - she certainly deserved to consider him her son (Exodus 2:5, 10).

To the best of my knowledge, the first historical record of citizens risking their lives against an unjust governmental law to follow a higher law of G-d and conscience are the Biblical verses I have just commented upon. This is the tradition of non-violent, peaceful resistance followed by Socrates in this famous trial, enunciated by Henry David Thorese in the middle of the nineteenth century and successfully carried out by Dr. Martin Luther King on behalf of civil rights for African - Americans in the 1960's.

Biblical law, as delineated in the Book of Deuteronomy and explained by the Talmudic Tractate Sotah (45a), distinguishes between an obligatory war (Chiefly defined as a war in self-defense, wherein the future life the Israelite nation is at stake) and a voluntary war, which - although sanctioned and perhaps even initiated by the Great Sanhedrin Court - does not have the urgency of a war fought on behalf of the very life of the new nation. Such a voluntary war allows for exemptions: an individual who has just built a new home but has not yet lived in it, who has just planted a vineyard but has not yet tasted of its fruit, who is betrothed but not yet married, as well as one who is fearful or tender-hearted (Deut. 20:5-8). Rabbenu Bahiya and the Ibn Ezra, commenting on the latter two categories of exemptions, interpret the one who is fearful as he who does not wish to harm anyone who is not hell-bent upon murdering him and one who is tender-hearted as he who is paralyzed by fear and will thereby reduce the morale of his fellow soldiers. The exemption of one "who is fearful" is an exemption for reasons of conscience.

In terms of the IDF, I do not believe that a democratically arrived- at decision of the government which is not absolutely counter to Jewish law - such as land for peace, about which there is a legitimate halakhic difference of opinion - should engender the refusal of an individual soldier to follow the orders of his

army officer. Our State is too fragile, our army too precious, and democracy too vital of a Jewish unifying ideal to allow for such factional separatism.

But if law-abiding citizens of Israel are asked to leave their homes and jobs by the Israeli Government, and that Government does not provide for them suitably parallel dwelling places and suitably parallel means of employment, such an expulsion is inhuman, is removing from those individuals their most basic human rights, and even soldiers must have the right to follow their conscience and refuse to carry out orders of evacuation in such an instance. Even the most lofty and crucial of government institutions must have a humanity conscience check - and - balance if the ideals of our nation are to endure. © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

**S**ince the expulsion of the seven-to-eight thousand residents of Gush Katif at the behest of the Israeli Government by the IDF and the Israeli Police Force two summers ago, an expression of the then Governmental policy of unilateral disengagement, and ideological battle has raged within the Religious Zionist Camp regarding the right (or even obligation) of an Israeli soldier to refuse to carry out military orders if they conflict with his conscience or religious standards. When, if ever, does individual conscience override governmental authority? Will anarchy not reign supreme, and Central governmental authority fall by the wayside, if every soldier of the IDF decides which orders are proper for him to carry out and when the authority of his Talmudic Academy overrides the authority of his army commander? This is a question with enormous ramifications for the future of our Jewish State. Some of these issues are touched upon by our Biblical portion of Shemot and are worthy of investigation.

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The second book of the Torah, Shemot begins with the Jewish people at a high level of accomplishment and integration within Egyptian society. But from this lofty perch of security and success in Egyptian society they are soon toppled. The situation changes dramatically for them and they go from being accepted and even respected to the position of abject and cruel slavery. And this slavery situation is not temporary, for it will last for centuries. Eventually the Jewish people, though not certainly all of the Jews, or even a majority of them, are freed from Egyptian bondage by Divine intervention and are forged into a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

This wild roller coaster ride from dizzying heights to terrible lows and then the climb up again, is a startling example of G-d's plan, so to speak, for Israel throughout all of its ages and climes. The Jewish world is seldom on an even keel. It has always been a series of ups and downs for us, many times even in one lifetime and generation. The past century is undoubtedly an excellent example of this pattern in Jewish history. Fortunate is the person who lives in the up times. But even that person has no guarantee that those good times are permanent and long lasting. The only thing certain in Jewish life is uncertainty. And even though we would wish for greater stability in these matters, we have to accept this Divine mandate of change and uncertainty.

Moshe's appearance in the parsha is another example of this roller coaster, up and down situation of Jewish life. Moshe begins life as an infant thrown into the crocodile infested waters of the Nile River. He then

is miraculously delivered from that fate of certain death and is raised as a prince in the house of the Pharaoh no less. He forfeits his high position out of loyalty and compassion to his Jewish brothers. A hunted man, he escapes Egypt and comes to Midian, there to marry and become a shepherd tending the flocks of his father-in-law.

Apparently there is no natural way that he can see to reclaim his role as a prince and leader. But at the incident of the burning bush the Lord plucks him away from his sheep flocks and sends him on his giant mission to redeem and educate the Jewish people, and through them of all of humankind.

Moshe rises to the highest level of human leadership and of spiritual attainment. He becomes the measuring rod - the symbol represented by his staff - of all future Jewish leadership and spirituality. But Moshe, like Israel itself, first had to be plunged into the depths of persecution and poverty before being raised to greatness. Why the Lord does things this way is naturally an unanswerable question. Suffice it for us to realize that this is our historical pattern, both in our national and personal lives. Let us hope that we will yet witness the ultimate high and full redemption of Israel and the vindication of Moshe's great vision. © 2007 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

#### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**A**fter being raised in the Egyptian palace, Moshe (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 Moshe looked to see if anyone was watching. With the coast clear, Moshe 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 (Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin, 18th Century in his Ha'amek Davar) reads it differently. In his view, Moshe, seeing a Jew beaten, looked to see if any Egyptian would stand up for him. Moshe looks this way and that way, but sees no one who seems to care. In the absence of Egyptian or worldly justice, Moshe acted. Things are not so different today. All too frequently, the world is silent as Jews are attacked.

Ha-ketav Ve-ha-kabalah (Rav Ya'akov Zvi Mecklenberg, 19th century) has another take. Moshe 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, Moshe 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 another way to look at it. Moshe was raised in an Egyptian home, but nursed by his biological Jewish mother. As a consequence, Moshe 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 grasps that he had not firmly established his identity, he makes a decision-he smites the Egyptian, symbolically eliminating a part of himself declaring unequivocally that he was a Jew.

The Talmud tells of an aging man who in a polygamous society decides to marry a second younger wife. Both wives vie for his affection. "You're graying," said 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, and tells 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.

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 step in as Moshe did to make the difference. To paraphrase our rabbis, in a place where there is no ish, struggle to be one. (Ethics 2:6) © 2007 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.

#### YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

## Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL SHLIT"A

*Adapted by Shaul Barth*

*Translated by Kaeren Fish*

**O**ur parasha opens: "And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov; each man came with his household... and Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all of that generation... And a new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Yosef." The midrash, at the beginning of Sefer Shemot, explains that so long as Yaakov's children were alive, the Egyptian subjugation did not begin, for the Egyptians feared them. Only after that generation died did the Egyptians begin to enslave them. But this would seem to contradict a different

midrash, from the end of Sefer Bereishit, according to which the exile began after the death of Yaakov. How are we to reconcile these two sources?

The key to understanding this may lie in the words of the Ramban, at the beginning of Sefer Shemot. Ramban describes the significance of the Sefer, and comments:

Sefer Shemot is devoted to the first exile, which had been explicitly decreed, and the redemption from it... For the exile is not ended until the day of their return to their place, until they return to the level of their ancestors. When they left Egypt, even though they had emerged from the house of slavery, they were still considered as exiles, for they were in a country that was not their own, wandering about in the wilderness. When they came to Mount Sinai and made the Mishkan, and the Holy One, blessed be He, once again caused His Presence to rest in their midst, at that point they return to the level of their ancestors... And then they were considered redeemed, and therefore this Sefer ends with the completion of the Mishkan, since G-d's glory filled it constantly.

The Ramban teaches here that there are two aspects to exile and, correspondingly, two aspects to redemption. Exile is, on the one hand, when Am Yisrael is not in its natural physical state, living sovereign in Eretz Yisrael; on the other hand, exile is also a situation where Am Yisrael is not in its natural moral state, maintaining the ways of their forefathers. Exile denotes not only physical distance from the land; it also means estrangement from the deeds of the forefathers and their moral path. For this reason, redemption is likewise not only a return to the land, but also moral redemption, where Am Yisrael repents and takes up the ways of their forefathers.

Based on this Ramban, we may explain that the midrash in Sefer Shemot, which says that the exile began after the death of all of Yaakov's sons, is discussing the physical exile. So long as Yosef's generation was alive, they fought in the Egyptian army and led soldiers into battle. The Egyptians saw their valor and were unable to subjugate Bnei Yisrael. Only after the death of Yaakov's sons could the Egyptians start the physical exile, with the subjugation of the nation. The midrash in Sefer Bereishit, on the other hand, describes the beginning of the spiritual exile. This began already at the time of Yaakov's death, when his sons did not follow his ways and began to assimilate into Egyptian culture-to the point where their descendants reached the 49<sup>th</sup> level of impurity.

Rav Kook speaks in many places of the State of Israel as "the foundation of G-d's Throne in the world;" he describes how the existence of this state expresses the beginning of the redemption. He taught this many decades before the establishment of the actual State of Israel, and Divine Providence guided things in such a way that when the state was

established, it was called "the State of Israel." (A different name could have been chosen; "Yehuda" was raised as a possibility.) Because of the name, people think that Rav Kook was speaking about our state. But in light of the Ramban's teaching, we may posit that Rav Kook was not speaking about the state in which we live today. Rav Kook's "beginning of the redemption" would take place in a state in which people would not only be living "in Israel," but would also return to the ways of their forefathers, where morality would be elevated.

Today, we find ourselves perhaps in a very early stage of redemption-a return to Eretz Yisrael; even this stage brings with it many problems, as we see today, being forced to fight continually to remain in the land. However, it is clear that we are not even approaching the second stage of redemption- the moral redemption. Only when we reach such a level will we be able to relate to the State of Israel as "the foundation of G-d's Throne in the world." It is in reference to that state that Rav Kook speaks.

May we soon merit, with G-d's help, to witness both the complete physical redemption and the complete spiritual redemption of Israel, and may we be worthy of bearing the title, "the foundation of G-d's Throne in the world." [*This sicha was delivered on leil Shabbat parashat Shemot 5765 (2005).*]

**RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

## Gratitude - The Legacy of Moshe

**B**oth Moshe and Pharaoh are introduced to us in parshas Shemos. By looking at these two individuals, we can get a better understanding of yetsias Mitzrayim, the pivotal event in both of their lives. We are told very little about the personal life of Moshe. From the few episodes that the Torah shares with us we can get a glimpse of Moshe as a person.

His name "Moshe" tells us a lot about his personality. One would have expected Moshe not to use his Egyptian name given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. Yet Moshe insisted on keeping this name as an expression of gratitude to the woman who saved his life as an infant and raised him. Moshe's commitment to showing gratitude to those who assisted him in times of need is evident from his approaching Yisro before returning to Mitzrayim. Hashem had commanded him to return immediately to begin the process that would free entire Jewish people from slavery. Yet before going, Moshe approaches Yisro and tells him of his plans to leave. Chazal comment that Moshe was not only informing him that he was going, but he was also asking him permission to leave. As critical as his mission was, it was inconceivable to depart from Yisro without his permission. Yisro took him in when he was in need and provided for him for many years. As

important as saving the Jewish people was, Moshe would not act in an ungrateful manner to one who had helped him. It is this commitment to hakoras hatov-expressing appreciation to others-that Moshe personified.

The behavior of Pharoh stands on stark contrast to Moshe's display of hakoras hatov. Pharoh is introduced to us as "vayakam melech chadash al Mitzrayim asher lo yaddaes Yosef-a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef". Chazal offer two understandings of the phrase "who did not know Yosef". According to the first understanding, this was in fact a new Pharoh who had never met Yosef. The second, however, understands "new" to mean that the same Pharoh who had in fact known Yosef was acting in a new way. This "new" king knew Yosef very well, yet acted as if he didn't. even according to the first understanding, that this Pharoh had never met Yosef, it is inconceivable that he did not know about Yosef. Not only had Yosef saved the entire country, but he had single-handedly transformed Mitzrayim into the wealthy kingdom that this new Pharoh had inherited. Furthermore, barely a generation had passed since the death of Yosef. According to both understandings, Pharoh acted in a most ungrateful manner by persecuting the descendants of the man who had saved Mitzrayim in its time of need.

In the first confrontation between Moshe and Pharoh, Pharoh responds o Moshe's request in the name of Hashem to free the Jewish people in a way that was consistent with his approach to Yosef. Although there are two opinions in Chazal as to whether the Pharoh confronted by Moshe was the same as the one "who did not know Yosef" or his successor, the response to Moshe was rooted in the same lack of gratitude Pharoh had shown Yosef. Pharoh says "lo yodati es Hashem-I do not know Hashem". How could Pharoh make such an absurd claim? Yosef who had rescued Mitzrayim through his knowledge of dreams had clearly stated to Pharoh years earlier that his understanding came only from Hashem. Yosef had served Pharoh from the age of thirty nine when he ascended to power until his death at the age of one hundred and ten. Throughout his career Yosef had proudly attributed his success to Hashem. Even in the home of Potiphar and in prison he was known as a man who was accompanied by Hashem and who received Hashem's blessings. Clearly this influential figure and the Hashem Who he served had not been completely forgotten by Pharoh. The response of Pharoh-"I don't know Hashem"-really meant I do not want to know Hashem and thereby be indebted to Him who had sent Yosef to save my nation. Rather than show gratitude to Yosef and Hashem, Pharoh denied the existence of both.

The confrontation between Moshe and Pharoh was a confrontation between an individual who never

forgot a kindness performed to him and one who intentionally "forgot" those who had helped him and his nation. This confrontation serves as an introduction to Yetzias Mitzrayim story and its commemoration for all time. We are commanded to remember Yetzias Mitzrayim in many different ways-twice daily during Shema, in the kiddush of every Shabbos and yom tov, and by dedicating all of Pesach to keeping this memory alive. Our entire commitment to Torah and mitzvos hinges upon our hakoras hatov to Hashem for taking us out of Mitzrayim. A person who chooses to be ungrateful and "forget" the kindness of Hashem will follow in the footsteps of Pharoh and declare, "lo yodati es Hashem". Our role model is who taught us never to forget a kindness. Only Moshe who remained eternally grateful and indebted to a daughter of Pharoh who raised him and to a priest of Midyan who opened his home to him can teach us how to remain grateful to Hashem Who saved us thousands of years ago.

The confrontation between Moshe and Pharoh was not merely a showdown between two men, but rather was a clash of two diametrically opposed approaches to benefactors. Some follow Pharoh and choose to forget the kindness of others. We are required to emulate Moshe and express our gratitude to our fellow man and ultimately to Hashem, the One who performs the greatest kindness for us all. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky and TorahWeb.org, all rights reserved

#### **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. © 2007 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

