

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE SHEMOT

DECEMBER 20-21, 2013

18 TEBET 5774

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Dave Bibi A'H, David Ben Farha 23 Tebet

Candle lighting this Friday evening is at 4:12 p.m. Mincha at 4:15 SHARP

Please pray for a refuah shelemah for Eliyahu Ben Regina  
Ely is recovering in Long Beach B'H

SHABBAT 9:00 AM - Please say Shema at home by 8:49

Shabbat Morning Children's Program 10:30 - 11:30  
Ages 0-5 - Morah Avital in the Playroom  
Girls Ages 6-12 - In the Upstairs Library  
Treats, Games, Stories, Prayers and Fun!

KIDDUSH: The kiddush this shabbat is being sponsored by Kathy Amiel and Barbra Levy in memory of their mothers. Hilda Amiel, z"l, Genevieve Freiser z"l.

Shabbat Ends – 5:12PM  
Return for Arbit – 5:30 PM followed by a short class

Please Join us this Saturday night for Game Night –  
5:45 - 7:30 -There will be pizza, raffles music, Torah and fun!

## SPECIAL SATURDAY NIGHT PROGRAM

Dr. Reeva Simon - Whose Jerusalem? The role of religion and politics in the history of Jerusalem.  
Motzeh Shabbat -Saturday night, December 14 at 7:30pm.

## WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE

Shaharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

## WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

Monday Night Class with Rabba Yenai – 7PM –  
Daily class with Rabbi Colish at 6:30AM

FROM THE Sisterhood of B'naiAsher  
Sephardic Congregation of Long  
Beach

We would like to thank everyone for  
coming on Monday evening to our  
Dinner honoring Helen Tenenbaum.  
We hope you had a great time. We  
would also like to thank the following  
people, without whom this wonderful  
evening could never have taken place:

Our Rebitzen Ida  
Kathy Amiel  
Patti Azizo  
Rabbi David Bibi  
Elsa Farbiaz  
Lisa Gaon  
Barbara Levy  
Rebecca and Herman Ovadia  
Elisheva Reinheimer  
Roni Shetrit and  
Penny Waldman

We would also like to acknowledge  
the wonderful generosity of all our  
raffle donors:

Dr. Abraham Abittan  
Kathy Amiel  
Beach Nails  
Bob's Health Food Store  
Elsa Farbiaz  
Five Town's Judaica  
Gabrielle Frieden  
Lisa Gaon  
Shop Glatt  
Serena Amiel-Gross  
Judaica Plus  
Dr. Bruch Kahn  
Barbara Levy  
Long Beach Variety  
Hindy & Robert Mizrahi  
Rebecca & Herman Ovadia  
Elisheva Reinheimer  
Elizabeth Rosner  
Penny Waldman

If we forgot or overlooked anybody,  
please forgive us. It was  
unintentional.

Shabbat Shalom.

Patti Azizo and Tina Lemberger  
Presidium, Sisterhood B'naiAsher  
Sephardic Congregation of Long  
Beach

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Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-289-2100

### Editors Notes

There is a story that Rabbi Abittan would tell of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter. who was once seen on the street in Vilna, chatting and laughing in what seemed like a very frivolous manner with one of the city folk. People who saw them noticed that Rabbi Salanter was trying to make the other man laugh at his jokes.

Observers were struck by how strange this behavior was for the Rabbi, as everyone knew that he was filled with the fear of Heaven, continually guarded his tongue, and never spoke an unnecessary word. Suddenly, contrary to his usual custom, here was Rabbi Yisrael speaking apparently idle words, and joking.

One of his students could not contain his curiosity, and got up the courage to ask the Rabbi to solve the mystery of his strange behavior. Rabbi Yisrael answered, "The person I was speaking to was depressed and bitter. I was just trying to cheer him up. There is no greater chesed than making a sad soul happy.

Although each of us would be expected to do nothing less for someone else, the story beckons us to consider this week's perasha and the responsibility and perhaps more so, the burden of leadership.

Every child can tell us the story of Moses at the burning bush and Moses' initial refusal to accept Hashem's request to lead the Jewish people. The first 17 verses of the fourth perek detail the conversation and Hashem's strong arm tactics in getting Moses to accept the commission. The midrash expands on these verses and tells us that these verses represent an exchange that continued for seven days.

G-d himself comes down to earth and appears before you and gives you a command which entails alleviating the suffering of millions of your brothers. How does one possibly refuse?

Until now, the Torah chose to tell us very little about Moshe other than a brief story where he saves a slave from an Egyptian. We have a bit of insight into his characteristic of empathy. He shows kindness without regard to any possible loss or danger that might befall Moshe himself. If that's all the Torah itself tells us about Moshe than that must be Moshe's core which makes the refusal even more puzzling.

The Torah tells us that Moshe at this point in history is 80 years old. As expanded on in the Midrash, Moses in his lifetime has been a prince of Egypt; a virtual son of Pharaoh who gave it all up in at the age of 20, in defense of his helpless relatives. He is convicted of rebellious behavior against the crown and is sentenced to death. He escapes and is a wanted man. Over the next sixty years, he becomes a mercenary warrior, a general, and eventually king of Ethiopia who one day gives up his crown and journeys to Midyan. There he is imprisoned and survives due to the kindness of Tziporah whom he eventually marries settling into a life of pensive solitude with no real responsibility other than watching his father in law's sheep. At 80 years old many of us retire to Miami to walk the beautiful green grass of the golf course. Moses in essence did the same except instead of a golf club he had a staff and instead of chasing a small white ball, he chased some small white sheep.

Many aspire to the halls of leadership failing to recognize the burdens that come with it. Moshe knew that both Bill Clinton and George Bush would enter the White House with their naturally colored hair and eight years later leave that house white and aged far beyond the days that had passed. The Washington Post notes: Photos of Barack Obama on Election Night 2008 look like they were taken much longer ago. Now his face has deeper creases and crow's feet, while his hair has turned white. "You look at the picture when they're inaugurated and four years later, they're visibly older," said Connie Mariano, White House physician from 1992 to 2001. "It's like they went in a time machine and fast-forwarded eight years in the span of four years." Moses knew the cost of leadership especially a leadership where one cares and yearns to do what is best for each of his subjects and wanted nothing of it.

Many of us experience the burdens of leadership whether it's a business owner with employees, a president of a school or other organization, a rabbi shepherding a community, a captain of a team or even a parent with a family. With leadership, comes responsibility and a proportional measure of pain.

With leadership comes sleepless nights and mind racking headaches. How does one tell a parent that their scholarship application was rejected? How does a boss fire two workers so that twenty others can remain employed? How does a parent tell a deserving child, no, to attending the school they dreamed of attending? How does a coach reject a player who wanted nothing more than to play? How does a mayor cut off services to certain segments of the population when the funds are running dry? How does a general decide which troops must go to the front and engage in battle? How?

Within days of taking a job he never applied for nor wanted and in the very next chapter we hear the people coming to Moses and Aaron, "And they said to them, The L-rd look upon you, and judge; because you have made us loathsome in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us."

People forget that leaders rarely if ever can control a situation. Leadership entails doing the best one can and dealing with the situation. Many leaders spend countless hours blaming themselves for things they could have done nothing to prevent. With leadership come difficult decisions that any good leader regrets having to make. We are often quick to criticize our leaders and rarely do we imagine what it's really like to be in their shoes. We think we can do better without realizing the self-sacrifice, the dedication and the heartache these decisions bring them.

Moses never wanted the job. But once it became his, he became the image of what a leader should be. Over the next forty years his shoulders bore the individual burdens of three million people. He worked tirelessly on their behalf. He took nothing for his efforts. He suffered enormously and still the complaining never ceased. Moshe was accused of anything and everything.

Moshe spent his life helping others with no ulterior motives and no self-interest. Accepting the title of leadership would bring honor which more than anything he hoped to avoid. Moshe was a natural helper, a complete giver; he wanted nothing for himself in return. This is the true quality of leader.

A friend found himself in a position of leadership in his Synagogue. I explained that he may have thought he was in a position of honor when in fact he needed to accept that he was now in a position of servitude. He needed to do for everyone and to do everything.

If you find yourself on a line and someone announces that the one who would lead should step forward.

Well you don't want it. You don't move. But suddenly you realize that everyone else on that line planned to take a step back, so only you would remain, you would be correct in being afraid. A true leader knows the burden and never seeks the position. But Hashem has a way of twisting arms whether we hear him loud and clear or simply as a silent whisper in the dead of night. If we find ourselves alone on that line than we have to give it our all. We have to be the best we can be. We need to realize the burden we are being given and that if it is being handed to us that it can be handled by us.

Each of us bears the burden in some way whether great or large. It came with Hashem's blessing to Abraham. Each of us has a destiny. The journey towards it is never easy. Free choice is the step we take either towards that destiny or away from it. And as the rabbi always told us, standing still is not an option because the field is not level. When we stand still we slide back.

We have completed Bereshit and for the next nine months we'll be with Moshe Rabeynu each week. The Torah is not a story book. The Torah is a manual on life and how to live it. We need to learn the lessons each week and incorporate them into our own lives.

And just as Moses led the people out of the exile of Egypt may each of us be blessed to come out of our own exiles, to fix the traits we need to fix, and reach our potential. And in doing that may Hashem bring Mashiach bimhera beyamynu to lead the entire world out of exile into redemption. Amen!

Shabbat Shalom

David Bibi

**Rabbi Ezra Labaton  
Bound with the Living  
By Jack Doueck**

In the book of Shemuel (I. 25:29) Nabal's wife Abigail gave King David a blessing that his soul should always be "bound with the souls of the living".

Rabbi Ezra Labaton's soul was always bound with those of the living - with his family, his students, his congregants, his community, his people, and the entire world.  
His soul is bound with my soul.

I first met Rabbi Labaton in the fall of 1982. I was 19 years old, and was just back from my year in Israel.

We instantly became friends.  
He had such an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and passion for teaching.  
He would say "I could have been a good lawyer... but this is what I love to do..."  
I was just overwhelmed by that.

When he gave his classes, he was in heaven. He would perspire even with full-blown air-conditioning and short sleeve shirts. How? You see, the rabbi was so passionate about his topics—his whole body would get into it with his mind and his voice... so he would perspire from excitement! Rabbi Labaton didn't just love HaRambam, it seemed to me that he was actually IN LOVE with him.

But it was his compassion, his loving-kindness, his constant support and continuous encouragement that touched me the most.

He was always so supportive. He would always ask me what I was learning, what I was writing, what I was thinking about. We would spend hours together on Friday mornings talking all about ME and my life - my marriage, my kids, my business, my classes, the books I was writing. He would give me books to borrow, books he would recommend I read, sources for ideas I was talking about. He would proudly show me his immense library with his 10,000 books and no matter how many times I volunteered to organize it for him - he would always decline and claim he loved it that way because he knew where every book was, every article, every pamphlet.

In 2002, during the Intifada, when a terrorist attack was hitting Israel every single day, and Israel was at war with Hamas - I heard that reservists in Israel were being called away from their families to fight. So I organized a trip to Israel for businessmen to volunteer in the Israeli Army. I called him to ask him if he would announce the trip in the Synagogue and see if anyone would want to join us. "Are you kidding? I want to come!" He was my first recruit and he was arguably the most cooperative, most dedicated soldier in the bunch.

Whatever troubles and tests I faced in life, I knew I could call the Rabbi and I would be overwhelmed by his generosity of spirit, his emphatic optimism: "How are you doing Rabbi?" "Incredibly well!". He had an invincible spirit that was infectious and just being in his presence would encourage me and support me and give me strength.

A few years ago, Ricky Rudy and I donated a plaque that was put up right outside the Rabbi's office. When

the synagogue underwent renovations, they had to take the plaque down.  
He must have sensed that I felt bad about that. Of course, he called me to tell me "Jack, even though they took the plaque down, I have it in my office and I look at it every single day. Thank You!"

That call meant so much to me. Not only did I feel better, but as usual, the Rabbi modeled his ideals and his lessons: he embodied "sedek sedek tirdof" – you shall always pursue justice and righteousness. He embodied compassion and love and sensitivity and connectiveness to others. He was truly 'serurah b'srouh hahayim'. His soul was always bound to other people's souls.

Yet I'm sure I am not alone in the feeling that no matter how much I admired him, he always gave me the feeling that he admired ME more! No matter how much I loved him, he made me feel that he loved me even more.

In November of 2011, my father passed away. The week I was sitting Shiva the Rabbi was undergoing chemotherapy treatments. He finished his chemo on Friday and I got up from my shiva on Sunday morning. I went to the cemetery, came home and had the most beautiful surprise: a day and a half after doing chemo, the Rabbi managed to get a lift from Deal, and take the hour+ trip with Raymond Saka to come visit me. We sat in my den without any distractions and it was such a fulfilling visit - I got such nehamah, such comfort and consolation. I didn't know how to thank him. I was at a loss for words.

About five years ago the Rabbi told me that he was running 5 miles a day so he can detox his system after his chemo treatments. I asked him how he had the strength to do that? Where did he find the energy? He said he had a secret: Our friend Sammy Sutton bought him a whole box of seasons of the show "24" and he would watch the episodes as he ran on the treadmill.

I had never heard of "24", but I thought that was a great idea.  
So, when I started to have problems in work, I bought the series and I would get on either the treadmill or the stationary bike while I watched episodes of "24" - just like my rabbi!

I continued that practice almost every night for the last 5 years. It enormously helped me to deal with the stress I was enduring.

When he started to drink gallons of green tea every day, he instructed me to buy and read "The Green

Tea Book.". Of course I complied, and started copying the Rabbi and drinking at least 4 cups a day (he told me numerous times that we all need to drink 8 cups a day).

I continue to drink a lot of green tea every day.

When I started a program to learn Mishna every day, the rabbi encouraged me and was the first person to sign up to join me.

After the summer of 1998 I made an "end of summer speech" during Seudah Shelisheet. That speech was called "The Ideal Synagogue". I spoke all about Rabbi Labaton: his values, his ideals, his love of learning, his tolerance of all people, his respect for the dignity of all human beings, and about how much I would miss him until the next summer.

He would sometimes mention that speech to me, about how happy it made him feel. So I turned it into a "Thank You" letter and sent it to him. He called me when he received it and expressed his gratitude to me for sending it. I found this letter in my files and re-read it this week.

He was often asked to speak at my Grandmother Virginia Sultan's book club and she always loved to hear his words of wisdom. But what was even more impressive was how he admired my grandmother! He would complement her and make her feel good about her wisdom and experience. This past summer, he found out that my grandmother was in the audience one Shabbat. So, before he started his speech - he stopped and mentioned that he was "pleased to welcome a special woman: Mrs. Virginia Sultan". My Grandmother, who is 97 years young, was just ecstatic: "Did you hear that Jack? The Rabbi mentioned my name!" She was like a little girl in a candy store on her birthday. So excited; so pleased; so honored.

That was one of a million little acts of kindness of Rabbi Ezra Labaton. Acts that made people feel good about themselves; Acts that encouraged people to make their individual contribution to better society, to make the world a better, more loving, more dignified place.

When I published my books: he celebrated them with me and I will never forget how when I gave him a copy, he hugged me!

Not a day will I ever stop mourning the death of my rabbi, my compass, my mentor, confidante, my friend. His loss has created a void in my life that will be impossible to fill.

I only hope I can live my life thinking about his legacy, his ideals, his values, his lessons: justice, righteousness, truth, integrity, human dignity – principles that, if lived properly, will create a better world.

When someone passes away, we say: "Tehi nishmato serurah b'srouh ha'hayim."  
"May his soul be bound with those of the living."

Rabbi Labaton: Your soul will always be bound with the living because you made such an impression on our lives.

You instilled your love of Torah within us.

You taught us your legacy: of "Tikkun Olam", of the concept of "selem elokim". Of the dignity of all man. Of the ethics in the Torah. Of "deracheha darchei noam". Of sedek sedek tirdof.

You didn't just teach these concepts - you lived them. You were the embodiment of "EBED HASHEM" – yet you loved people and loved to teach us, help us, encourage us, inspire us and be with us.

Rabbi Labaton: I'm going to miss you so much.

I'm going to miss praying with you in the morning, observing how you pray with fervor.

I'm going to miss sitting in your classes and watching you teach with passion.

I'm going to miss your Shabbat speeches, and the way you sing the Kiddush and other prayers with enthusiasm (even though you were so tone deaf!).

I'm going to miss your wise counsel, your unconditional friendship, your constant support and encouragement, the loving way you looked at me with your big beautiful smile, your optimism, your wisdom, your Torah – ALL OF YOU.

I'm going to miss your essence, your soul - which was and will always be bound to mine.

In the last 24 months, I lost both my parents - now I have lost you. But just like a parent - you enriched my life to no end, leaving me without words to express my grief and without enough adjectives to express my profound gratitude.

I will never be the same because I had the good fortune and blessing to find you and have you in my life.

Tehi zicrono baruch, ve'tehi nishmato serurah b'srouh ha'hayim. Amen.

### Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st Aliya: The Jews had been in Mitzrayim since 2238. The Parsha begins as Pharaoh orchestrated the oppression of the Bnai Yisroel. Starting in 2362, with the birth of Miriam, the oppression began in earnest as newborn males were drowned in the Nile. The heroism of the two Midwives was rewarded.

2nd Aliya: Moshe's birth and "basket river cruise" is detailed. He was adopted by Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh, and raised by his own mother, Yocheved.

3rd Aliya: Moshe killed the Egyptian but was turned in by his own people. Forced to flee, he ended up in the house of Yisro. Moshe married Tziporah, Yisro's daughter, and Gershon, his first son, was born. The year was approximately 2428, and Moshe was 60.

4th & 5th Aliyot: Moshe received his mission at the Burning Bush. The Medresh says that the entire conversation lasted 7 days. At its conclusion, Moshe, armed with the power of Hashem's promise and the three "signs", was prepared to confront Pharaoh.

6th Aliya: Moshe asked Yisro for permission to go on his mission. Along the way, Hashem attempted to kill Moshe, but Tziporah saves him by giving their son a Bris Milah. Aharon went to greet Moshe, as per G-d's commandment. Moshe and Aharon met with the Elders and received their support.

7th Aliya: Moshe and Aharon unsuccessfully confronted Pharaoh. Pharaoh punished the Jews by refusing to supply straw for the making of bricks. The Jewish officers were held responsible and were beaten by the Egyptian overseers. The Jewish officers confronted Moshe and Moshe then confronted G-d. Hashem reassured Moshe that his mission would be successful.

### EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

The slavery in Egypt begins with the decree of Pharaoh to throw all Jewish baby boys into the Nile. The daughter of the wicked king stood at the riverbank and saw an infant in a wicker basket among the reeds. The pasuk tells us that she saw a child, and a youth was crying. She exclaimed, "This is a Jewish child."

Who was actually crying and how did she know it was a Jewish child? Most people assume that it was the infant Moshe in the wicker basket who

was crying, but the Ba'al Haturim says something incredible. The child who was crying was Aharon! Now we can understand the conclusion that Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, drew. She knew it was a Jewish child because one brother was crying for the other.

This is our hallmark as Jews. We care, cry for, and are concerned about each other. In light of this let us share a remarkable story, told by Rabbi Pesah Krohn, that occurred in Israel a number of years ago.

Rabbi Simcha Wasserman zt"l, the son of the legendary Rav Elchanan Wasserman hy"d, moved to Israel in the 1970's after spending more than two decades in Los Angeles where he founded Yeshivah Ohr Elchanan. While in Jerusalem he became a close friend to Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz z"l, the noted member of Kneset representing Agudat Yisrael. They became habrutot (study partners) and learned together for years. Tragically, Rav Simcha and his wife had no children. They chose their burial place which was to be Har Hamenuchot in Jerusalem. They were buried in those plots one after another within a short period of time. Rav Simcha passed away on the second of Heshvan (1993) and his wife, Faige, passed away ten days later.

Many years earlier Rabbi Lorincz had bought a burial plot in Har Hazeitim, located just east of the Old City. However, after Rabbi Wasserman passed away Rabbi Lorincz told his family that he wished to sell his plot on Har Hazeitim and buy one on Har Hamenuhot next to Rav Simcha. His reasoning was beautiful "Sadly Rav Simcha and his wife had no children," Rabbi Lorincz told his family. "Who then will go to pray at his grave, especially on the day of his yahrzeit?"

Seventeen years later he passed away on Rosh Hodesh Heshvan. Because the custom is not to visit a cemetery on Rosh Hodesh, the custom of Ashkenazic Jews is to visit on the day later. Therefore the Lorincz children always visited their father's grave on the day after his yahrzeit, the second day of Heshvan, and then honoring their father's wishes, they would recite prayers at the grave (right next to his) of his friend Rav Simcha, on the exact day of his yahrzeit, the second of Heshvan. True brothers and sisters care for each other, sometimes in extraordinary ways.

Rabbi Reuven Semah

**“And a man went from the house of Levi”  
(Shemot 2:1)**

Did you even wonder what merit the parents of Moshe Rabenu had, to have a son like him? Rabbi Nissim Yagen z"l once said in our synagogue the answer to this question. When Amram, the father of Moshe, saw that Pharaoh was drowning all Jewish baby boys, he divorced his wife, reasoning that it doesn't make sense to be married and have children and they should then be killed. All the people followed suit and divorced their wives, since Amram was one of the leaders of the generation. When his daughter, Miriam, who was only five years old, saw this, she told her father, “Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's, because by your separating from your wife there will be no Jewish boys and no Jewish girls, whereas Pharaoh only decreed on the boys.” When Amram heard the truth in these words, although it came out of the mouth of a child, he accepted them wholeheartedly and remarried his wife, Yocheved. From that union came out Moshe Rabenu, about whom it is said, “,מִשֵּׁה אֱמֶת וְאֵלֹהֵי אֱמֶת מִשֵּׁה אֱמֶת וְאֵלֹהֵי אֱמֶת” Moshe is the paragon of truth who gave us the Torah of Truth.” Since Amram accepted the truth wholeheartedly and changed a decree, although it was not easy to do, he merited to have Moshe, who represented the truth.

Do we hear the truth about things we may have done incorrectly, and change them, or do we try to ignore the whole subject. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

**RABBI ELI MANSOUR**  
Visit [DailyHalacha.com](http://DailyHalacha.com), [DailyGemara.com](http://DailyGemara.com),  
[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)

**We Cannot Outsmart G-d**

The Torah in Parashat Shemot tells of Pharaoh's decree that every newborn Jewish boy be thrown into the river. The Sages explain that Pharaoh saw through astrology that the redeemer of Beneh Yisrael would soon be born. In an attempt to stop this from happening, he issued a decree that all newborns among Beneh Yisrael should be killed. He felt confident that this measure would prevent the leader from emerging.

In the end, of course, his plan failed, Moshe was saved, and Beneh Yisrael were led out of Egypt. But the plan's failure runs even deeper. It was Pharaoh's own daughter who rescued Moshe and raised him in the palace. Pharaoh was determined to kill the leader while he was still an infant, but in the end, the leader was raised in his own home. He himself fed and supported the man whose existence he feared.

We cannot outsmart G-d. As much as we would like to think that we can control our destiny, and that we hold the keys to our success, G-d exercises complete control over us.

We see this message unfold in a different aspect of the Exodus story, as well. The Torah describes the Pharaoh who enslaved Beneh Yisrael as “not knowing” Yosef (“Asher Lo Yada Et Yosef” – 1:8). As the Rabbis note, it is inconceivable that a king would arise over Egypt who had never heard about Yosef. Yosef was the one who saved Egypt from widespread hunger and economic ruin, leading it to become the wealthiest and most prosperous nation on earth. Undoubtedly, the new Pharaoh heard about Yosef. The Hachamim thus explain this verse to mean that the new king reversed Yosef's policies. One of the measures undertaken by Yosef during the years of drought was requiring the Egyptians to undergo circumcision. This was done in an effort to curb the nation's population growth, in order that there would not be so many people to feed, given the limited food supply. But Pharaoh saw that Beneh Yisrael were rapidly reproducing despite practicing the custom of circumcision, and thus concluded that there was no longer any purpose served by enforcing this law. And so he revoked Yosef's legislation requiring the Egyptian males to undergo circumcision.

This revocation of Yosef's decree is what paved the way for Beneh Yisrael's redemption. When Pharaoh's daughter saw a baby floating in a basket in the river, she looked at the baby and immediately recognized him as a Jew (“Mi'yaldeh Ha'ibrim Zeh” – 2:5). How did she know this baby belonged to Beneh Yisrael? The Sages explain that she noticed Moshe was circumcised, and thus immediately identified him as a Jew. If her father had not revoked the decree requiring all Egyptians to be circumcised, she would not have been able to identify Moshe as a Jew, and he would thus not have been nursed and raised by his mother. He would have been raised never knowing his Israelite origins, and would thus not have emerged as Beneh Yisrael's leader. Remarkably, it was Pharaoh himself who paved the way for Beneh Yisrael's redemption.

One of the famous passages in the Haggadah that we sing at the Seder is “Ve'hi She'ameda,” where we proclaim how in every generation people rise against us, “Ve'ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu Masilenu Mi'yadam” – “But the Almighty rescues us from their hand.” Some commentators explain the phrase “Masilenu Mi'yadam” to mean that Hashem saves us “from their hands” – through the enemies' own efforts. They plot and conspire against us, but those efforts themselves



become the cause and source of our salvation – as was the case with Pharaoh.

This is one of the many lessons to be learned from the story of Yesi'at Misrayim. Although we can and must make an effort to care for ourselves and do what we think is the best for us, ultimately, Hashem exercises full control over us, our lives and the world. Even the most sophisticated, well-planned strategies can backfire and have the opposite effect if this is what Hashem decides to do. We should try our hardest – but while recognizing that ultimately we are powerless and everything is controlled by the Almighty.

### **Rabbi Wein**

The Torah does not describe for us in any form whatsoever as to what happened to the family of Yaakov - who are now the people of Israel, and suddenly very numerous and at one time very influential and comfortable in Egyptian society - in the years between the death of Yosef and the enslavement of the Jews many decades later.

The Torah is not here to give us a narrative of interesting historical facts and, as it did in the book of Bereshith, it skips over decades and even centuries without giving us any in-depth description. But Midrash does attempt to somehow fill that void and portrays for us on one hand a people who attempted to remain separate and unique from the Egyptian majority culture by its dress, language and historical memory and yet on the other hand succumbed to adopting Egyptian gods and beliefs.

The Egyptian exile was the prototype for all later exiles. It posed the challenge of how to remain steadfastly Jewish while living under foreign rule and enmeshed in a foreign, even alien, culture and belief system. This has remained the major challenge of Jewish existence throughout the ages. This challenge accounts for the relative paucity of the number of Jews in the world and for the continuing pressures – anti-Semitic and otherwise – that constantly threaten to erode Jewish identity and even existence.

Every place of Jewish exile in the Diaspora has faced this challenge. Some localities have fared better than others in coping with it. Though the challenge has remained constant, the responses to it have varied from place to place. Apparently what may have worked successfully for one society and time may not be the correct solution for another.

It is important to note that the redemption from Egyptian exile was facilitated by Heaven through

unlikely means and by a surprising champion of Israel's cause. The likely choice for becoming the redeemer of Israel from Egyptian bondage was certainly Aharon. He was present with the Jews during the darkest years of persecution and was recognized by the people as its leading personality. He led the tribe of Levi, the tribe of scholars of Yaakov's Torah and the bearers and teachers of his tradition.

His brother Moshe, who disappears from the scene of Jewish suffering in Egypt for approximately sixty years, was raised in the palace of the hated Pharaoh and does not appear to be especially articulate in speech. As a shepherd, he engages in an occupation reviled by the dominant Egyptian society and culture. Yet it is Moshe who is the redeemer, the lawgiver, and the greatest of all prophets that the world will ever know.

It is Moshe who will teach Israel the Torah, which alone will be the necessary guarantee for Jewish survival and growth in all of the societies in which it will find itself to be part of. God's guidance and protection of Israel lies in providing the Jewish people with proper, even if unlikely, leadership to meet the challenges constantly imposed on a small people by varying times and place.

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks**

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 childhood of a hero.

But this is only the surface. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another and 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 ark floated down the river, and 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 went further. In a remarkable midrash, we read of how the young Miriam confronted her father Amram and persuaded him to change his mind. 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 Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him. "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.[1] 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. Told 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 lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilization: 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, lay 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.[2]

The fifth is Zipporah, 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, it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4: 24-26). The impression we have of her is of a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, has 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 it 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 give her a name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4: 18) mentions a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she 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." [3]

They added that she was one of the few (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.[4]

So, on the surface, the parsha is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women with 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 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. There were great women Torah scholars from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) to 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).[5] 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 Maimonides held any official position (some scholars say that Maimonides 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, Zipporah 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.

## AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

"And When Hashem saw that Moshe turned aside to see, Hashem called out to him from the midst of the bush..." (3:3)

The Torah is coming to emphasize the importance of becoming a Seeker, 'Mevakesh'.

Therefore, the beginning of the Pasuk is stated although it seems unnecessary.

It was solely because Moshe was a seeker that he gained this vision. It was only because "Hashem saw" that he turned aside to see that therefore "Hashem called to him." Moshe was chosen only after he demonstrated his eagerness "to see."

To gain greatness of spirit, one must be eager for greatness of spirit. Even we today should "turn aside to see" the demonstrations of Hashem's presence that are evident on all sides.

A rose bush, burning with beautiful color, is an opportunity for seekers of Hashem to see His glorious handiwork in the miracle whereby the plant has the ability to produce such a magnificent creation, including the miracle of producing design and pigment and fragrance from the air and the soil.

Even the thorns of the rosebush bespeak Hashem's kindness and cunning plan-and-purpose; because this prized plant is equipped with defensive weapons of sharp thorns pointed downward to meet the upward pull of the thief who would attempt to uproot the plant.

"To make known to the sons of man Your mighty deeds" (Ashre). A purpose of life is to take full advantage of the many opportunities presented to us thereby demonstrating that we are 'seekers'. Greeting people with a full face and pleasant smile along with encouraging words.

Saying words of appreciation to a spouse. A nice word to a child. Helping people in need.

Praying for the protection of Jews worldwide.

Thinking about and thanking Hashem.

Learning Hashem's Torah.

These are some of the opportunities we have.

"In the path a person wills to go, Hashem will help to direct him".

Be a Seeker. Go for it!

Adapted from "A Nation Is Born" by Rabbi Avigdor Miller ZT'L