

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

## SHEMOT

Haftarah Sephardim: Yirmiyahu 1:1 - 2:3

JANUARY 2, 2016 21 TEBET 5776

**DEDICATIONS: In memory of David Ben Farha – Dave Bibi  
And Sarah bat Esther – Sarah Cain**

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### Editors Notes

#### It's All About The Name

Last week, we concluded the first book of the Torah, the book of Bereshit or Genesis. Bereshit is predominantly the story of a family, of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and of Jacob's children. They are the family of Israel (Jacob's other name is Israel) who descend down to Egypt. This week we begin the second book of the Torah, the book of Shemot. In English, this second book is called Exodus and tells the story of the development of a nation. The Benai Yisrael, the children of Jacob who came down to Egypt become the nation of Israel and emerge from their servitude to receive the Torah and build the Mishkan on their march to the land G-d promised to their forefathers. Shemot though in English actually translates to "names" from the verse, "And these are the name of the children of Israel who are coming to Egypt". We are told their names as Genesis ends and we are told their names as Shemot begins. Strangely enough the Midrash returning to the subject of names, relates that when they were finally redeemed from Egypt, it was in the merit of four virtues. The first merit mentioned is that they didn't change their names. This is typically taken literally meaning they kept their Hebrew names and did not take on Egyptian names. An alternative translation of shemot might be reputation. Following this thought we might understand that they were redeemed because they maintained their good reputation.

One of the most repeated phrases my father drummed into us was the first half of the first verse of the seventh chapter of Kohelet. "Tov shem, mishemen tov ... " meaning, "better a good name or reputation than expensive oil". My dad would explain that the greatest asset we had was our good name and if we honored it, that name would serve us better than money ever could. My dad, as usual, was right. So often in my life, my name opened doors and brought lots of payback to those who came before

me. It is experiencing in real time what we call zechut avot or being rewarded in the merit of our ancestors.

Last Wednesday on the Yahrzeit of my grandmother Esther Bibi, I gave a class and closed it by relating a story from 1989 on the value of a good name. It was July 4th weekend, and we had just moved into our house in Atlantic Beach. On one of our regular trips to Europe, Chantelle had bought a mini bed for Jonah who was going to be two. When we moved into the house and the bed was delivered, we realized that there were no standard mattresses for this bed. With the dimensions in hand, I drove to a mattress store on Rockaway Turnpike and met an elderly man. I explained the dilemma and he told me that this was going to be a very expensive venture. He then asked me my name. When I told him, he asked if I was related to an Esther Bibi from Bensonhurst. "She was my grandmother and she just passed away in December", I replied. He took off his glasses, rubbed his eyes and a bit choked up; he told me the following.

"It was 1933 and I was 19 years old and working as a delivery person. It was the depression and I was lucky to have a job, though the hard work especially in the summer often left me exhausted. The boxes were heavy and everyone was demanding and unappreciative. It's hard for you to imagine how tough things were. People really didn't even have enough to eat. We could go all day, from house to house and we were lucky to get a glass of water. Tips were almost unheard of.

"I remember the day. It was late Thursday afternoon, almost evening and unusually hot for May. There were two of us making deliveries that afternoon. We came to a big house. It was right off Bay Parkway on 21st Avenue and the house spanned the entire block between 62nd and 63rd Street. The house was filled with kids and there were six or seven of them having dinner. We thought that Mrs. Bibi was an older sister and we were shocked when they all called her mom. She couldn't have been thirty. After we brought in all the boxes, she asked us if we wanted something to drink. We told her that would be great as we hadn't stopped for anything since 8 in the morning. She invited us to sit for a moment at the table as the younger kids vacated their spots. It was good to take a load off our feet. A moment later she set two plates of food in front of us. We were embarrassed because

we thought she would be simply giving us water. But our empty stomachs were not too embarrassed to eat. We were starved and so appreciative.

"We were speaking with a couple of the older kids and Mrs. Bibi asked where we lived and how our families were managing during these difficult times. I told her that we lived in the neighborhood and we were OK, but I was worried as I was getting married on Sunday. We were going to live in a small apartment in the basement of my bride's parent's home. My folks had given us linens and towels and she had a set of dishes and silverware from her grandmother. My bride really wanted a set of pots and pans and I felt badly as I really couldn't afford them and would have loved to give them to her.

"Mrs. Bibi told me to have faith, continue to work hard and everything would fall into place. She was sure that things would get better. She asked me where we were getting married and she wished me the best of luck.

"We walked out of there commenting on what a lovely lady she was and what a nice family she has.

"On Sunday, I arrived at the wedding hall. There were some boxes that had arrived earlier in the morning with a note. The boxes had a new set of pots and pans. And the note was from Esther and Reuben Bibi wishing us the best of luck and telling us to always have a positive attitude and to be there for each other and to always have faith as everything always works out for the best.

"That was 56 years ago this May. I am still married to my wonderful wife. We were blessed with a beautiful family and I will never forget your grandmother and what joy she brought to a real stranger.

"For the grandson of Mrs. Esther Bibi, the custom mattress will be on the house. It's my gift to you and your child. Although I am meeting you for the first time I am so sure that the kindness she and her family showed me that day, you as her grandchild and the baby, her great-grandchild, who will get this mattress will continue to show to others. I am only sorry that she passed away as I would have loved to see her and thank her in person."

I was speechless.

Later I realized that If he only knew that the story he just told me would be more valuable than any mattress could ever be.

These are the names; this is the reputation, of the children of Israel who came to Egypt. Better a good name than good oil. This is a lesson my father taught us again and again. And it's a lesson which we must repeat to our children, again and again.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

**ARE YOU PLANNING TO GO OUT TO CELEBRATE NEW YEARS AND WATCH THE BALL ... These are highlights from a great class by Rabbi Lawrence Keleman which relate to the celebration of New Years,**

To listen -

<http://www.simpletoremember.com/media/a/Real-Story-of-X-mas-and-New-Years-b/>

In 46 B.C.E. the Roman emperor Julius Caesar first established January 1 as New Year's day. Janus was the Roman god of doors and gates, and had two faces, one looking forward and one back. Caesar felt that the month named after this god ("January") would be the appropriate "door" to the year. Caesar celebrated the first January 1 New Year by ordering the violent routing of revolutionary Jewish forces in the Galilee. Eyewitnesses say blood flowed in the streets. In later years, Roman pagans observed the New Year by engaging in drunken orgies -- a ritual they believed constituted a personal re-enacting of the chaotic world that existed before the cosmos was ordered by the gods.

In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII abandoned the traditional Julian calendar and established the Gregorian calendar which differs from the Julian in three ways: (1) No century year is a leap year unless it is exactly divisible by 400 (e.g., 1600, 2000, etc.); (2) Years divisible by 4000 are common (not leap) years; and (3) once again the New Year would begin with the date set by the early pagans, the first day of the month of Janus - January 1.

On New Years Day 1577 Pope Gregory XIII decreed that all Roman Jews, under pain of death, must listen attentively to the compulsory Catholic conversion sermon given in Roman synagogues after Friday night services. On Year Years Day 1578 Gregory signed into law a tax forcing Jews to pay for the support of a "House of Conversion" to convert Jews to Christianity. On New Years 1581 Gregory ordered his troops to confiscate all sacred literature from the Roman Jewish community. Thousands of Jews were murdered in the campaign.

Throughout the medieval and post-medieval periods, January 1 - supposedly the day on which Jesus' circumcision initiated the reign of Christianity and the death of Judaism - was reserved for anti-Jewish activities: synagogue and book burnings, public tortures, and simple murder.

For Jews, The day is more an anniversary of mourning than one where we could possibly engage in reckless and drunken merriment.

So now that I have completely ruined your New Years eve plans let me end with a thought from my club going days.

Those of us who would party every night would know that on New Years eve, one takes the night off. New year's eve was the night 'the regular people' came out and we considered ourselves anything but regular. As Jews, we should remember that we are special, so this year leave the celebrating to everyone else, leave it to the regular people, because you really are more than just regular.

Why not have a class or go out with friends for dinner?

The following was written by R' Yaakov of Husiatyn ZT"L in the name of the Apter Rov ZT"L and sent to me by the holy Rebetzen Aliza: "Contrary to popular belief, January 1, is an important date for the Jewish people. It is when all those tefillos that might not have been prayed with the proper intent on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, and were not accepted in Heaven, get a second chance. Unlike the Jewish new year, when we congregate in synagogues all over the world and pour out our hearts in serious contemplation, the gentiles of the world use their 'New Year' to conduct wild, often drunken, parties, to celebrate making it through another year. The contrast is glaringly clear and it often can eliminate any and all prosecution that withheld a good judgment on Rosh Hashana. We must daven extra hard on their 'New Year' that we merit a sweet 'New Year' even if it didn't actually start on our 'New Year!'"

### **Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading The enslavement begins. Moshe is chosen as a leader.**

- 1- Benei Israel grows in size. A new king institutes hard work for the Jews and tells the midwives to kill the newborn boys
- 2- Moshe is born. He is put in a basket in the water. Batya takes Moshe from the water and raises him.
- 3- Moshe kills a Mitsriy and is forced to run away to Midyan. There he meets Yitro and marries his

daughter, Sipora. Hashem hears the cries of benei Israel in Mitsrayim.

4- Hashem appears to Moshe from a burning bush and tells him to go to Paroah and save Benei Israel. Moshe does not want to go.

5- Hashem gives Moshe signs so the people should trust in him. After much hesitancy and deliberation with Hashem Moshe accepts the task

6- Sipora circumcises her son. Moshe returns to Mitsrayim and tells Benei Israel that Hashem appointed him to redeem them. The people believe in Moshe.

7- Moshe goes to Paroah to request a 3 day holiday in the dessert. Paroah responds by taking away the straw and making the work harder. Moshe complains to Hashem.

### **Ve'samach be'libo- The lesson of being happy for others**

It is interesting to note that after many parshiot of brotherly strife including that of Kayin and Hevel, Yitshak and Yishmael, Yaakov and Esav, Yosef and the brothers, the last two parshiot exemplify the idea of brotherly love. Last parasha we saw that Efrayim was blessed with the right hand (the stronger hand) and Menashe, the older brother with the left, yet Menashe was happy for Efrayim and he did not become jealous. Now in our parasha Hashem tells Moshe that Aharon will be happy in his heart that you were chosen as the leader. "Ve'samach be'libo" this is an attribute of greatness. To be happy when others have success. It is a key to a happy life. Some get jealous and upset when others succeed. It eats us up inside. And we become unhappy people. And some feel a true genuine happiness when others succeed. They see others do well, they see good things happen to others and they truly feel a simcha like they themselves had that good thing happen to them. If we could strive to be that person how much happier would we be. Every simcha would be our simcha. Every wedding, every new baby, every business success for those around us would be our success. How great would life be!

### **EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN**

**"A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi." (Shemot 2:1)**

As we begin the book of Shemot, the Torah tells us of a wedding. This is the wedding between Amram and Yochebed, the parents of Moshe Rabenu. Rashi explains that this wasn't the first time they were married. The Gemara in Sotah (12) gives more details. Amram was the generation's leader. When Pharaoh declared that all the Jewish baby boys that were born were to be thrown into the Nile,

Amram divorced his wife, Yochebed. He felt it wasn't right to bring babies into the world only to be killed. The rest of the nation followed his lead and divorced their wives. Miriam protested to her father that what he did was wrong, and so Amram remarried Yochebed. The rest of the nation followed and remarried their wives.

There is a lot to discuss about that conversation between Amram and Miriam, but I would like to call your attention to the actions of the rest of the nation. They followed the lead of Amram to divorce and remarry their wives. That showed the tremendous trust they had in their leader, which we call *emunat hachamim*.

Rabbi Yitzchak Hisiger tells an amazing true story of *emunat hachamim*. Rabbi Yitzchak Zilberstein related that he was once learning with his brother-in-law, Rav Chaim Kanievsky, at his home several years back. There was a knock on the door. Rebbetzin Batsheva Kanievsky opened the door to find a harried young man, who muttered something about having an urgent question for Rav Chaim. The Rebbetzin ushered in the young man, who told Rav Chaim that his wife was in critical condition. A particular treatment had been recommended by doctors, who claimed that there was no choice but to have this treatment done. Otherwise, her life would be in serious danger. The woman replied that she would not consent to the treatment until she received the approval of Rav Chaim. (I must interject at this point that it is well-known that Rav Chaim had saved many lives with his medical advice.)

Rav Chaim, after hearing the details, dismissed the doctor's claims. "She does not need the treatment," he said simply. "Everything will be okay *be'ezrat Hashem*."

One of the people in the room mustered the courage to ask Rav Chaim what everyone else was wondering. "We're not dealing here with doctors who don't know what they are talking about," he said. "If a doctor says that there is an urgent need to perform a certain treatment, how can the Rav rule for the woman not to listen to his recommendation?" Rav Chaim waved his hand once more and repeated, "Everything will be okay *be'ezrat Hashem*."

The young man left the house satisfied, fully accepting the advice he had been given by Rav Chaim. Those who remained behind were still looking for answers.

Rav Chaim turned to his listeners and said, "Of course the doctors know what they are talking about. They don't recommend such things without reason. In general, they direct a patient to receive the treatment that is appropriate and necessary. However, in this case, by coming to ask a question, this woman demonstrated that in her mind there is something more significant than the views of the

doctors. It is this very act – her submission to *emunat hachamim* – that is the deciding factor. By demonstrating this belief, she is no longer under the control of normative medicine and the knowledge of doctors. She entrusted her well-being elsewhere, namely in *emunat hachamim*. In light of this fact, she has the power to nullify the natural medical channels followed by other people and adhere to a completely different approach." Rabbi Reuven Semah

**As we begin the book of Shemot, Exodus, we can see right away why this is called the Book of Redemption**, for it talks about the exile into Egypt, the bondage and servitude under the Egyptians, and the ultimate redemption thereof. Why, however, are the portions dealing with the Mishkan, the Tabernacle, placed in the book of Shemot? What do they have to do with the Redemption?

The Ramban tells us that the redemption was not complete until the Jews came back to the level of the forefathers, and that was when we had the Mishkan with the Divine Presence in it. This was a replica of the homes of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, who also had the Divine Presence completely among them and which was manifested by the Clouds of Glory on their tent, the Eternal Lamp shining inside and the dough constantly fresh, just like in the Mishkan. This is truly a remarkable statement. The Mishkan was only a replica of the tents of our forefathers. How foolish are those who speak against our ancestors as if they were from our generation, ascribing to them our own faults and frailties, when in reality they were like angels on this earth. We have no concept of the holiness and greatness of these individuals and anyone who thinks they can understand them with our own limited vision is really revealing flaws in his own character, rather than in those he may be speaking about. As the Gemara sums it up, if the earlier generations are like angels in our eyes, then we are compared to human beings, but if we think they are humans, we are only like donkeys, and not even like the donkey of Rabbi Pinhas ben Yair! Let us take this lesson of Ramban to heart and realize how awesome and elevated are our ancestors so that we may learn even the slightest amount from them. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### **EARMUFFS**

One of a mother's most frustrating tasks is getting her children to dress properly for the inclement weather.

"Wear your hat! Where did you leave your gloves? Did you leave your scarf in school? No, it is not warm outside, and yes, you must wear your hat!"

This scene is common in houses all over the city any morning when the temperature drops into a danger zone during the cold and flu season.

We might understand a child's resistance to the good advice of a mother, but it is difficult to figure out why the husband of this same mother also becomes argumentative when, as a loving, concerned wife, she suggests, "It's cold and windy this morning; I think you ought to wear earmuffs for your walk to shul." Her spouse, aware of the arctic air mass that swooped down from Canada, still will not listen to his wife's sage advice. "I won't go out there looking like Mickey Mouse," he retorts. "I'd rather freeze than become the laughingstock of the neighborhood!"

Knowing what is right and doing the correct thing are subject to a very strong force called peer pressure. People are driven to risk their health by smoking cigarettes, driving while intoxicated, or imbibing dangerous substances out of fear of what others may think of their behavior. This human frailty can be life threatening.

When it comes to the spiritual realm, the damage is immeasurable and eternal. Fear of what others might say has held many people back from the spiritual progress they were capable of achieving. The Shulhan Aruch, the Code of Jewish Law, opens with instructions to be brazen in the face of ridicule if the scoffers are trying to stunt your spiritual growth or deter the performance of Hashem's commandments.

He quotes the Mishnah (Abot 5:20): Be as bold as a leopard...to do the will of your Father in Heaven.

Whenever you are about to do something good, but pause to consider what others might think, arouse the tiger in you and rise courageously to the occasion. It only takes a little strength, but your efforts will be repaid in eternal dollars. (One Minute with Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

#### **RABBI ELI MANSOUR**

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[MishnaBerura.com](http://MishnaBerura.com), [LearnTorah.com](http://LearnTorah.com)  
"And the Land Became Filled With Them"**

Toward the beginning of Parashat Shemot (1:7), the Torah describes Beneh Yisrael's rapid population growth in Egypt. It concludes by saying, "Va'timaleh Ha'aretz Otam" – "The land became filled with them." The situation became such that wherever the Egyptians went, they encountered people from Beneh Yisrael. The Midrash, commenting on this verse, says that Beneh Yisrael filled the theaters in Egypt. Egyptians would arrive at the show and find Jews sitting in their seats.

This situation marked a drastic change from the previous state of affairs. When Yaakob and his family first settled in Egypt, they lived separate from the native Egyptians. The Jewish area of settlement

was confined to the region of Goshen, where Yaakob set up a Yeshiva and he and his offspring generally lived apart from Egyptian society. This situation began to change when the last of Yaakob's sons died. With the demise of the last great spiritual figurehead, Beneh Yisrael gradually left the secure confines of Goshen and assimilated. They got involved on all levels in Egyptian society.

And this is when the trouble began. The Egyptians took notice of the Jews' sudden "invasion" of their society, and grew suspicious. These suspicions paved the way for the dreadful period of slavery and persecution that Beneh Yisrael endured in Egypt.

We cannot overlook the similarity between this process and the process that occurred more recently in Germany. The Jews of Germany decided to leave their enclaves and adopt a German lifestyle. They thought that by breaking down the barriers, by being more like the Germans, by abandoning traditions and practices that made them different, they would earn the gentiles' favor and goodwill. In short, they figured that assimilation is the answer to anti-Semitism. But they were tragically mistaken. It was specifically as a result of the Jews' becoming more like the Germans that the Germans felt threatened and suspicious. Like in Egypt, the Jews' presence in the "theaters" bred resentment and laid the groundwork for deadly persecution.

Megilat Ester begins by telling of the lavish party that King Ahashverosh hosted in his palace for the people of Shushan, and tradition teaches us that the Jews of Shushan attended and fully participated in the celebration. One Rabbi suggested that this event may have likely ignited, or at least exacerbated, Haman's feelings of hatred toward the Jews. He began wondering why these foreign people are taking up space in the palace, why they are feeling so at home in Persia.

It is a mistake to think that we will earn the trust and favor of other nations by being like them and embracing their values and lifestyle. History has proven that assimilation makes matters worse, not better, as it causes mistrust and resentment, rather than respect. The safest way to live in exile is to remain in "Goshen," to remain fully committed to our ancient traditions and stay away from the "theaters" of the non-Jews. We will then succeed in preserving our traditions and avoiding the hostility and resentment of the people around us.

## VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

### DATAN AND AVIRAM

The names of Datan and Aviram are interpreted allegorically in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 109). Datan because he transgressed the Dat - דַּת -law of Hashem. Aviram because he was אִרְבִּי fortified against doing Teshuva. These sons of Eliav and grandsons of Reuven are referred to in the Talmud (Nedarim 64) as the quarreling ones. They begin their negative activities in Misrayim prior to Moshe's escape to Midyan; continuing to foment trouble upon Moshe's return to redeem Bene Yisrael. They appear again during the exodus from Misrayim and numerous times as the rebellious ones in the Midbar.

### QUESTIONS TO BE ADDRESSED

Why do we find them as a constant source of harassment; causing Moshe what appears to be undue suffering even after (as we will see) the kindness he bestowed upon them? What was their source of strength to survive and continue for so many years unabated as fomenters of trouble? What instigated their rebellious nature even towards the Creator?

### KINDNESS OF MOSHE

According to the Midrash (MR and SR 2:11-12) Datan was one of the Jewish officers דִּירְטוּשׁ in Misrayim. An Egyptian taskmaster had relations with the wife of Datan and there was an ensuing quarrel. Moshe saw this taskmaster beating Datan, and came to his defense and killed the Egyptian. Moshe went out the next day and saw Datan and Aviram quarreling (YR 119) regarding the previous day's incident. Moshe in his kindness stepped in and prevented them from critically injuring one another.

### HARASSMENT OF MOSHE

Thus began a series of defiant acts by these evil ones against Moshe who sacrificed his own position to show them kindness. R. Y. Shrem (mid 19th century -Aleppo) cites the Midrash that Moshe smote the Misri using a Divine Name. In killing the gentile, Moshe (who had speech difficulties) did not require to utter sounds associated with the letters דַּת אִרְבִּי - דַּת אִרְבִּי - Datan and Aviram taunted Moshe by asserting that he lacked the linguistic ability to kill them. The Divine Name associated with the killing of a Jew differs as it does indeed require the sounds associated with these letters. Moshe ran away realizing that they too ( besides Par'oh) were hostile,

even threatening to use the Divine Name against him! After his stay in Midyan, he is assured by Hashem (4:19) "The men who seek your life have died." The Talmud (Nedarim 64) asserts that these men included Datan and Aviram who were no longer a threat as they had become impoverished; this according to the Talmud being synonymous with death. R. Shrem explains that a condition to be able to make use of the Divine Name is that he not be one who accepts gifts from others to his own disgrace. Hence, Moshe was advised that their poverty stalled any intent to harm him. We know that they did denounce Moshe to Par'oh and revealed (YS 167) that he was not actually the son of Par'oh's daughter. They continued to incite the people against Moshe (SR 129) demanding a return to Misrayim at Yam Souf and again when the spies returned from Cana'an (MT 106:5). They lead the revolution of Korah directed against Moshe. They defied Moshe's summons; accusing him of having brought Bene Yisrael out of the fertile land of Misrayim in order to have them die in the Midbar. (Meg 16).

### REBELLION AGAINST HASHEM

Hashem instructs (Shemot 16) Bene Yisrael to only gather what was needed for daily consumption of the maan מַן - and under no circumstances may anything be left over. The Torah reveals that two men did not listen and did indeed save over their portions. On Shabbat the Jews were instructed by Hashem to refrain from gathering the מַן - maan. Nevertheless the Torah informs that "some" did go out to search on shabbat in defiance of Hashem. The Midrash (SR) and Ohr Ha'efelah assert that these rebels of Hashem's word were none other than Datan and Aviram.

### SOURCE OF THEIR STRENGTH

R. Yonatan Domb sights a statement of R. Aha Bar Hanina found in the En Yaakov on Hulin (9th Perek). "All who do kindness for one who does not have the sense to recognize the good done for them ; it is as if he tosses a rock to the idolatry of Mercolies." Namely the good the donor does for them, actually provides strength to their negativity. Datan and Aviram who were not recognizers of the good done by Moshe, were actually strengthened in their power to do evil through the kindness done for them by Moshe. The power of the greatest prophet's kindness served as fuel to propagate evil. This explains their success in perpetuating havoc amongst the people of Israel for so many decades.

### WHY MOSHE SUFFERED AT THEIR HAND

Two teachings are sighted in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 92) in the name of R. El'azar. "If a person does not have understanding it is forbidden to have mercy on him"; If one gives his bread to someone who does not "recognize good" - suffering comes upon him (the misguided donor). R. Yisrael Kanievsky explains that this is not a reference to one born without understanding; rather the subject here is one who refuses to recognize the good done for him. If the donor continues to have mercy on this type of individual - he himself will be the cause of his own suffering that befalls him. Moshe via his mercy towards Datan and Aviram - (who did not recognize the good done for them) generated thereby the suffering that befell him at their hand.

### REBELLING AGAINST HASHEM

R. Baruch Rosenblum sights a teaching from the Midrash (Mishnat R. Eliezer) that if one begins to be an ingrate to his friend he will end up being an ingrate to his Creator. This fits perfectly with what occurred with Datan and Aviram. They initially rebel against Moshe and end up rebelling against Hashem in the Midbar.

### DOWNFALL OF DATAN AND AVIRAM - POWER OF SPEECH

Earlier we cited R. Shrem who asserted that Moshe feared their ability to use the Divine Name against him. Evidently, they had a power of speech which was used in all of their evil endeavors. It would be this power that would turn against them contributing to their downfall. It began according to the Ba'al HaTurim when Reuven their Grandfather had offered to take upon himself the responsibility to return Binyamin to Yaakov. In his offer he said, "You may put my two sons to die". This oath though not accepted by Yaakov still contributed to the tragedy of Datan and Aviram. This conforming to the teaching in the Talmud that words contribute to a reality. The Talmud (Mo'ed Katan 16) teaches that when Moshe humbly went to dissuade Datan and Aviram from joining Korah they were impertinent and insulting to him. The Midrash (Bemidbar R. 18:10) calls out their response to Moshe's plea. "We will not go up". (16:12) This the source asserts was their unconscious prophesy of their downfall. They would not go up! but rather would descend to Gehinam.

### RECOGNIZING THE GOOD

We in contrast to Datan and Aviram must always strive to be grateful for all that is done for us by the Creator and our fellow human beings. This admirable trait will actually bring benefit not only to ourselves but will enhance and multiply the kindness done by our benefactor.

### Rabbi Wein HATERS AND PROBLEMS

Hate is a very powerful emotion. It generates skewed vision, violent behavior, and in historical terms, national and personal disasters. There are many causes for hatred. Jealousy, indoctrination, feelings of revenge and suspicions (many times completely unfounded) are just a few. But the most lethal forms of hatred that usually unleash killing and mayhem are those that are religiously or ideologically motivated.

These types of hatred carry with them a degree of complete self-justification. It has the imprimatur of Heaven or of superior knowledge that sanctifies it. Thus hatred is transformed from a negative trait into a positive and desirable one. And then there are no behavioral limits imposed on the haters. Everything is fair in hate and war.

The world today is wracked in conflicts of hatred. And hatred usually generates an opposing hatred that destroys all sense of justification and proportion. Hatred dominates all other emotions and creates irrational violent behavior. We are witness as to how it impacts the lives of millions of people worldwide and the fear it generates that dominates the behavior and actions of all people.

The past century could be characterized as a century of hate. And this current century is not off to a more promising start in this respect. There certainly is no easy answer as to how to, at the very least, tone down the hatred. By making war against the enemy, hatred will only be increased and will certainly create an additional cycle of hatred on all sides. This is a pretty bleak picture of our current world society.

The main haters and hated in today's world are the Islamists who are engaged in brutal terror against their fellow Moslems and the Western and Jewish world. Their awful behavior has naturally produced an enormous backlash against Moslems generally.

Here in Israel, the Arab waves of terror against innocent Jews have produced shameful retaliation against innocent Moslems by Jewish extremists. They have not only taken the law into their own hands but they also claim Divine justification for their



murderous behavior. This is only one of the many instances in our society, in my opinion, of how the name of God, so to speak, is regularly invoked in vain.

The violence perpetrated by the extremists in the Charedi community against other Jews, the demonization of Israel by the extreme Israeli Left, the palpable hatred of the Orthodox by the non-Orthodox groupings and the resultant repayment in kind by the Orthodox, all are examples of this smug piety that justifies violent speech and actions.

All of them have convinced themselves that they are doing God's work here on earth. Arrogance leads to hatred of others and that hatred sooner or later leads to violent consequences. One would think that rational good people would attempt to eradicate this plague through education at the earliest levels of study. Instead we find that at all levels of study, many of our educational institutions, and of other's, indoctrinate hate of the "other" as being a tenet of knowledge and a necessary worldview. That is where the tragedies begin to unfold.

The home also plays an important part in formulating and institutionalizing hatreds. We believe what our parents teach us at an early age. And even if we mature and grow out of our blind acceptance stage of life, what we heard and learned at home remains with us our entire life. Thus haters breed further generations of haters.

This partially explains why the Nazis destruction of Jewish Europe in World War II proceeded so smoothly and efficiently. The homes and schools, the societies and those who spoke in the name of God had created more than enough haters to commit and justify genocide. And when haters can form a critical mass in any society or faith, terror and violence become inevitable by-products of that hatred.

Unfortunately, history informs us that there will always be haters amongst us. But no society can afford to allow them to become the heroes and martyrs honored by that society. It is not only the violence that the Palestinians perpetrate against innocents that is so disturbing. It is also that those murderers are treated as noble people, that streets are named after them, and that their families are rewarded for the killings of innocents that jars our sensitivities and dashes our hopes for an end to terror. We may never be able to remove all the haters, theirs and ours, from the world's societies. But we should not allow the inmates to run the asylum

### **Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Turning Curses into Blessings**

Genesis 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"[1] – 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.

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 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. [2]

"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.[3]

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.

[1] Ex. 1:9. 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?

[2] Luke Johnson, 'Animal Spirits: Israel and its tribe of risk-taking entrepreneurs,' Sunday Times, 4 October 2015.

[3] Paul Johnson, The History of the Jews, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, 58

### 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

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