

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

SHEMOT

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 1:1 - 2:3 for Sephardim / Yishayah 27-28 for Ashkenazim
JANUARY 14, 2012 19 TEBET 5772

DEDICATION : In memory of Dave Bibi - David ben Farha 23 Tebet
And Sara Cain - Sara bat Esther 25 Tebet

WE ARE LOOKING TO ESTABLISH A BIKKUR CHOLIM COMMITTEE – To coordinate with assistance for any families with members of the family in the hospital, to assist mothers after birth, to assist with meals to assist those who are sitting Shiva – Please speak with Roni Shetrit

WE ARE ALSO LOOKING FOR A COMMITTEE TO ASSIST FAMILIES WHO HAVE SUFFERED A LOSS in preparing for the funeral, making arrangements with the Chevra Kadisha, contacting Misaskim for assistance with things needed in the Shivah house, arranging the minyanim and helping to coordinate mencham avel. Please speak with Sam Shetrit

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION ANNOUNCEMENTS AND SCHEDULE

FRIDAY NIGHT Mincha at 4:30 – Followed by Kabbalat Shabbat and Arbit (Candle Lighting: 4:31)

SHABBAT SCHEDULE

- Shharith: 9:00 Kiddush this week is sponsored by Kathy Amiel to commemorate the yehrtzeit of her Mother Mrs Hilda Amiel and by Barbara Levy to commemorate the yehrtzeit of her mother Mrs. Genevieve Freiser
- Benai Asher Youth Program 10:45 – 11:45 with Rikki Waldman
- Mincha following Kiddush
- Women's Learning Group 4:15 Alternating speakers, seudat shlishit served, at the Lemberger's 1 East Olive. Class is always cancelled if there is inclement weather.
- Arbit at 5:20pm followed by Havdalah – Shabbat ends at 5:35pm
- Class at 6:15PM with Rabbi Colish
- Movie Night is Back 6:15pm with Dave's Pizza
- Melave Malka with Rabbi Yaakov Reisman scheduled for Saturday Night has been postponed

WEEKDAY TEFILLA SCHEDULE Shharit Sunday 8:00, Mon-Fri at 7:00 (6:55 Mondays and Thursdays)

WEEKDAY TORAH CLASS SCHEDULE

- Introduction to Prayer 9:00 – 9:30 Sunday Mornings with David Bibi or Rabbi Colish
- "Wisdom from the Wisest of Men" Mon-Fri 6:30 AM – based upon King Solomon's Proverbs
- Men's Halacha Class Tuesday Nights 8:30-10:30: Basar BeChalav
- Ladies Tuesday night class 8PM – for this week's location and subject speak with Leah Colish or Chantelle 917-620-1607
- Kosher Kitchen – we are in the midst of setting a time for the class, choices are Sundays mornings, Sunday evenings, Tuesday at 8 or 8:30 or Wednesday at 8 or 8:30. If you have a preference, now's the time to mention it to Hindy or Rabbi Colish. Begins February.

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Sunday Funday will continue in February
- TONIGHT January 13th 2012 at the Young Israel of Long Beach – a joint event – Shabbat Dinner Catered by Meal Mart, Donation p/p \$18.00 with children \$10.00, Please contact Tara Spiess (516) 432-1515 or Rivka Bohan (516) 749-9099 for reservations
- January 28 - Rabbi's Yehrtzeit. The entire Abittan family will be with us for Shabbat
- February 3 - Friday night dinner at the shul to commemorate the Rabbi's yehrtzeit. Program details to follow.
- Join us for the first of many movie nights sponsored by the Sephardic and Lido Synagogues on Moztei Shabbat, February 4th at 7:30. We will be watching the 2007 Israeli thriller Ha Hov (The Debt) at the Lido Synagogue while our children will be watching a movie at our synagogue. Refreshments will be served. Cost: \$5 per person. Checks can be made out to our synagogue.
- February 12th – Sunday ISLAND ROCK - Indoor Mountain Climbing. Bring the whole family! Ages 4 and up. \$22/person. 11am -1pm. Speak to Rabbi Colish to sign up.

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EDITORS NOTES

It's really late ... Just spoke with my daughters Aryana and Mikhayla who are in the rain in Jerusalem preparing for Shabbat with their friends in their apartment. They quickly made Challahs which looked like bricks – Mikhayla quickly noted that this week we read of the Jews making bricks in Egypt and thus her dozen brick shaped Challahs. I asked for a picture and I received an image a pyramid built with challahs.

I looked at Jonah's pictures of an earthly paradise which he sent a few hours ago from his hotel room in Phuket where he is with his wonderful wife Lauren and where Shabbat has already begun. And outside here the sun is peeking out from the clouds making its path to our own Shabbat. What a blessing. Thank You Hashem!

So as my dad suggested when there is no time to write ... I went back to the archives and pulled this one from a couple of years ago. This was the first article I looked at and with a stack of tasks from the Synagogue on my to do list for the next few days I felt it apropos. Some weeks Synagogue complaints get one to the point as they say in the old country (to me that's Ocean

Parkway in Brooklyn) of declaring "Haj"! Enough! I am out of here.

I am deeply grateful this week to Rabbi Fischel Todd of the Shulchan Aruch Learning Program and to Rav Don Channen who was visiting from Israel for their coming out to see me, for their never ending support and timely encouragement. I am also so appreciative of the opportune advice I received last week from Rabbi Yaakov Hillel and was so pleased to see him in person and thank him on Sunday night. Rabbi Abittan would remind me constantly that Hashem prepares us well in advance of the headache and I just need to open my eyes and see it.

The Perasha comes each week, year after year, with its many messages. We need to look into the messages and find the one being communicated to us.

There is a story that Rabbi Abittan would tell that Rabbi Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler quotes from the book Olam Chesed Yibaneh. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter 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 made me think of 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. There is even an opinion that tells us that had Moshe acquiesced immediately than the Jewish people would have left Egypt a full year sooner.

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 aside from Midrash the Torah chose to tell us very little about Moshe other than his midot, his characteristics of 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! He is a virtual son of Pharaoh who gave it all up 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 according to the midrash 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 no 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. 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 rabbi shepherding a community, a business owner with employees, a president of a school or other organization, 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.

Before the Israelites left Egypt, the midrash tells us that during the days of darkness four fifths of them died. Imagine 80% of the Jewish people died a week before

the Exodus. What pain did Moses personally feel?

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 me standing still is not an option because the field is not level. When we stand still we slide back.

We pray that Hashem help us especially with the difficult and gut wrenching decisions. We pray that we remember who we are and push our egos aside. We pray that we do the right thing even when it feels so wrong. We pray that we have the fortitude to accept the servitude and to never expect gratitude for the things we do.

We have completed Bereshit and for the next nine months we'll be with Moshe Rabenu 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 beyamaynu to lead the entire world out of exile into redemption. Amen!

Shabbat Shalom,
David Bibi

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

"It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren." (Shemot 2:11)

When Moshe Rabenu was still quite young, the Torah tells us that he went out to the countryside to see firsthand the enslavement to which his brethren were subjected. When he saw an Egyptian beating a Jew, he saw that there was no one around so he killed the Egyptian. Rashi says that "he saw no one around" means he examined the Egyptian's soul and determined that no righteous descendant will come from him. Later it is also revealed to us that he killed the Egyptian by uttering one of Hashem's Holy Names and using its powers.

Moshe Rabenu was young at the time. Some commentators say he was only a teenager, and he lived in the palace of Pharaoh from the time he was weaned from his mother Yocheved. Midrash Tanhumah says that his adopted mother, Batya, kept him within the confines of the palace until that day when Moshe went out to observe the slavery. Nevertheless, by the time he left the palace, he had already become a spiritual giant, possessing Divine vision and Divine powers to use at will. The question is obvious. How was Moshe able to achieve such a high level at such a young age, if he was always in the palace, surrounded by idolatry?

Rabi David Hofsteder explains, based on the Zohar and other sources, that Moshe Rabenu was born with a unique soul. This soul gave him greater potential for spiritual achievement than anyone who ever lived or would ever come after him. The Zohar says, "Even before Moshe

was born, he existed on a very high plane. Therefore, the Shechinah remained with him from the day he was born." He needed this special soul to have a potential to be a person that could go up to Heaven and receive the Torah and bring it down to the Jewish people. He was born with the potential to override the laws of nature and perform miracles for the sake of his people. All this was his potential. It was up to him to use it for good and not to become part of the ways of Pharaoh. If Moshe was born with such great capabilities, it is understandable that he needed no teacher to become the greatest prophet.

There is an important lesson here. While every person has free choice, Hashem sends certain very special people into this world endowed with lofty souls from birth. Certainly there is none to compare to Moshe; nevertheless, Hashem sends exalted souls to every generation. Those are the sadikim and gedolim (Torah giants) of each generation. On a superficial level we may think we understand their intentions and the reasons they conduct themselves as they do. The truth is, however, that many times we cannot truly comprehend the reasons and intentions behind many of their actions. Therefore, sometimes we cannot question them. Therefore, let us honor them appropriately and heed their guidance for our own benefit. 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

THE PROBLEM WITH SUCCESS

Sometimes success is the greatest deterrent to achieving a goal.

Success comes in stages. When you go on a diet to

lose fifteen pounds, the first five melt away pretty quickly. When you commit to an exercise program – whether it involves running, cycling, or working with weights – the initial improvement in strength and stamina comes almost at once.

And that is the problem. That first jump in a positive direction can lead to complacency and sabotage the systematic progress needed to reach the ultimate goal.

It takes consistency to achieve a goal. It takes what our elementary-school teachers called "stick-to-it-tivity."

The trick to success is to continue working on yourself even after seeing improvement. When you feel that you are better than you were when you embarked on a self-improvement project, don't stop. Don't slack off. Take that next step forward towards your objective, because methodical dedication to a goal until it is achieved is what yields success.

It only takes a minute of focus and evaluation, but that pause to reflect will jump-start you and boost you to the next level. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

Rabbi Elie Abadie, M.D. The Rabbi's Corner

Much has been heard and read about Egypt since last February, when the protesters promising democracy and freedom toppled Hosny Mubarak after 30 years of rule. The entire world was both cheerful and hopeful that at last, 82 million people would now have liberty and a democratic state. Not me! I knew what was coming on, and where those protests would be taking the Arab world to. In a similar vein, the entire Arab world went up in protests and government change; some have already succeeded and others

are on their way. It appears, however, that as much as things change in the Arab world, they remain the same. Egypt is neither a new country nor a novel land.

Perashat Shemot introduces us to ancient Egypt, the land of the Pharaohs that went through similar change. There were not protesters or rallies, as far as we know; however a change in dictatorship did take place. The Israelites, descendants of Jacob, Joseph and his family had been living there for over 130 years in relative peace and tranquility. The new Egyptian leadership 'did not know of Joseph' and therefore reneged on all of the promises and agreements made to Joseph and his family to host them and treat them properly. The new Pharaoh began mistreating the Israelites, oppressing them, enslaving them, and ultimately killing them at birth if they were male. He proclaimed to his entire population that 'behold, the People, Children of Israel, are more numerous and stronger than us; come let us outsmart it..' The rest of the story is well known to all of us and to the rest of the world. Despite the crushing and oppressing slavery that Egypt dealt to the Israelites, ultimately the Israelites were freed. Moshe was born and eventually was selected to lead the Israelites out of the country after a crushing defeat of Egyptian forces. This was a result of the devastating 10 plagues and the war at the Sea of Reeds, where Egypt saw its final demise.

Of course, the Egypt of today is totally different than the ancient Egypt of the Pharaohs, or is it? Well, it is a different people ethnically, its people practice a different religion and speak a different language. Yet, their attitude toward Israel and the Jewish people, after 3400 years has not changed. For over 30 years, their relationship with Israel

and the Jewish people was relatively tranquil and at peace; however, not in the truer sense of the word. During those 30 years, a pilgrimage of Jews to the tomb of Rabbi Yaakob Abuhazira, located 150 km north of Cairo, took place every year. This year, it was cancelled by Egypt because they did not want "Zionist Jews in Egypt". The Gas Agreement is being challenged and the entire Peace Treaty is being revised. This is the new Pharaoh that 'did not know of Joseph'.

How ironic it is that in ancient Egypt, they did not want the Jews to leave; and in today's Egypt, they do not want Jews to enter. The source of issue, you see, is not the exiting or entering...it is the Jews!

We shall, however, overcome this one, too; just as we did 3400 years ago. I just hope it will not take 10 plagues and a crushing defeat of Egyptian forces in order to attain our liberty once again.

Shabbat Shalom,

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
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Consistency – The Greatest Achievement of All

The Torah in Parashat Shemot tells of Pharaoh's cruel decree that all male infants born to Beneh Yisrael should be put to death immediately at the time of birth. The two Israelite midwives who delivered the nation's babies heroically defied Pharaoh's decree, risking their lives in order to protect the newborns.

The Torah identifies these two women by the names "Shifra" and "Pu'a," but our Sages teach us that these were not their real names. These women were actually Yocheved and Miriam – Moshe Rabbenu's mother and sister, respectively – but they

were referred to as "Shifra" and "Pu'a" because of their expertise and devoted work in caring for the newborn babies under their charge. The name "Shifra" evolves from the Hebrew verb "sh.f.r.," which means "enhance" or "beautify." Yocheved earned this name because she skillfully cared for the infants and made them beautiful. And Miriam was named "Pu'a" because of the playful sounds she would make to calm and soothe the infants ("Pu Pu, Ah Ah").

One Rabbi noted the irony in the fact that Yocheved and Miriam were given names commemorating their work as midwives. These two women were national heroes. They flatly ignored an explicit command of the powerful Egyptian king in order to save countless lives, putting their own lives at risk to this end. Isn't this heroism more worthy of commemoration in their names than their handling of babies? Why were they named specifically for their work as midwives, and not for their heroism in defying Pharaoh?

We learn from the names "Shifra" and "Pu'a" that consistent, day-to-day devotion is a greater achievement than the "big things" done at special moments. Many, and perhaps even all, people are capable of rising to the occasion at certain times and achieve something great. We oftentimes see community members who excel when they are called upon to join a committee, spearhead a project, or meet a certain urgent need that arose. This is certainly laudable, but the true barometer of greatness is the consistent handling of one's ordinary day-to-day challenges and responsibilities. There is much to be said for the big moments, and Yocheved and Miriam are undoubtedly known as heroines for their defiance of Pharaoh. But

even greater than isolated moments of heroism is lifelong consistency, devotedly tending to one's duties each and every day, just as Shifra and Pu'a worked devotedly caring for the newborn infants day in and day out.

Many people do not regard parenting as a glorious profession, but in light of this lesson of Shifra and Pu'a, good parenting is the greatest of all achievements. A good parent works consistently, every day, tending to the children's needs on an ongoing basis. Cooking and serving dinner, helping with homework, chauffeuring to appointments, birthday parties and afterschool programs – each chore on its own may not necessarily reflect greatness, but when all this is done consistently, day after day, week after week, and year after year, it reflects greatness like nothing else.

Certainly, we should aspire to rise to the occasion when the big moments arise, when we are called upon in extraordinary situations to act "heroically" and do something exceptional. But the greatest achievement in life is the day-to-day grind, being consistently good in meeting the tasks that come our way on a daily basis. This is how we become truly great people.

Rabbi Wein

We find many instances in the Torah where strangers, seemingly bystanders who are unconnected to the main characters and events of the narrative, play a pivotal and decisive role in the unfolding of the story. In a sense, they become the catalyst for all that occurs later.

The escaped refugee who comes to tell Avraham about the capture of Lot, the man who finds Yosef wandering lost in the fields in

search of his brothers are but examples of this recurring theme throughout biblical narrative. In this week's parsha the daughter of the Pharaoh plays this unknowing role in Jewish history and world civilization.

Going down to the Nile with her maidservants she spies the small floating crib of the infant Moshe and she reaches out for it before the crocodiles can get to it. She thereupon sees the crying infant and even though the baby is from the Jewish slaves she takes pity upon him and secures a wet nurse for him and eventually brings him home to the palace where she raises him as her son.

And out of this strange and unlikely sequence of events, the great Moshe emerges to eventually lead the Jewish slaves out of Egyptian bondage and to bring them to Torah and eternity at the revelation at Mount Sinai. And though it is certainly God that oversees the unfolding of all human scenarios, it is through human beings making choices and decisions and behaving according to those choices that the story of humankind continues to unfold.

Nothing compelled the Pharaoh's daughter to be compassionate towards a defenseless Jewish child in danger. It was her choice and out of that choice the fate of all humanity is allowed to take a positive turn.

The tradition of the Jews is that this daughter of the Pharaoh was named Batya – the daughter of God Himself, so to speak. She is remembered in that her name has been given to myriad Jewish women over the thousands of years of Jewish existence. The continuing custom of naming Jewish women after her expresses the gratitude of the

Jews for her life saving act and her human compassion.

The Talmud teaches us that the crib floating in the river was seemingly out of her reach and yet she stretched forth her hand to attempt to bring it to her. When human beings do all that they can for a noble cause or kind deed then many times Heaven takes over. Her hand somehow became elongated sufficiently to bring the crib into her reach and the baby's salvation.

Again, it is this almost mystical combination of human choice and Heaven's guidance that accomplishes this forward thrust in the story of humankind. And the Torah emphasizes that it was not sufficient for Batya to temporarily save the infant from death but that she pursued the matter of the child's welfare to the utmost, finally raising him as her son in the royal palace of the Pharaoh.

Many times we do good and compassionate deeds but we do them partially not really completing the task. The Talmud teaches us that "If one begins a mitzvah we say to him: 'Complete it.'" Batya's immortality is assured amongst all of Israel for her complete and voluntary act of compassion, goodness and mercy.

Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky - Parsha Parables Hit Singles

This week we read about the emergence of Moshe, from Egyptian prince to defender of his people. The turning point, it seems comes when Moshe sees an Egyptian striking a Jew. Moshe defends the Jewish man and kills the Egyptian. The act is noted, and Moshe, afraid of governmental retribution, flees to Midian. It is there that he meets

his wife and tends to Yisro's flock and ultimately meets the Almighty at the burning bush.

But I'd like to explore the first part of the saga. The Torah tells us that Moshe, "saw an Egyptian man striking an Ivri man, from his brothers" (Exodus 2:11).

The language is awkward. Why would the Torah say, hitting an Ivri man from his brothers? Whose brothers? Certainly not the Egyptian man's brothers. And if the Torah is referring to Moshe's brother's "his Ivri or Jewish brothers", why is it necessary to say that at all? If the man is an Ivri, surely he is "from his brothers".

The Story: I remember years ago, back in 1973, I was 15 years old, studying in the Talmudical Yeshiva of Philadelphia. The Yeshiva was located in suburban Philadelphia, about a mile from St. Joseph's College and there was basically a peaceful coexistence, at least until one hot summer Friday night.

Let me explain. Every Friday night after the Shabbos meal, there was an unofficial custom for some of the boys to walk off the meal by circling the block. We walked in twos.

Most of us would take the stroll in full sartorial splendor. We wore our ties, jackets and black fedoras, something the Rabbis of the Yeshiva felt was appropriate for budding Talmudic scholars.

It seems, however, that those black hats were the object of either ridicule or desire for some of the St. Joe's students who were also walking in the vicinity. One of them grabbed one of the boys' hats and put it on his head. A group of Yeshiva boys chased them back to the Yeshiva property where one of the older

Bais Medrash boys, a young man studying in the college-level program, caught up with the perpetrator. He was quite strong and fearless and earned himself the nickname "Blackjack Friedman." He caught up with one of the college hoodlums and tackled him. We were about to jump on the guy, when his friend jeered at us and screamed, "Hey! It's one on one. Stay out of it."

The college kid got up and the two ended up duking it out on the lawn of the Yeshiva. Instead of defending "Blackjack" and joining the fight, we listened to the command of the other college punk and let the two go at it one on one. We stood there, surrounding the two fighters like spectators at Madison Square Garden cheering for Blackjack, like he would be a professional fighter who would be walking away with a large purse.

The fight was going on for about a few minutes, and fists were flying while we were cheering, when suddenly one of the boys ran into the Bais HaMedrash to rally the troops. Within moments a stream of young men (college aged and not the prototypical puny Yeshiva bochur), ran toward the fight scene. Before they all got a chance to pounce on the perpetrators, the hoodlums realized that they were terribly outnumbered and took off.

I will never forget the shmuz my Rebbe gave us the next day. He chastised us strongly, "How dare you, even as High School boys stand cheering on the sidelines while a Jewish friend is being pummeled. Why did it have to take someone 3-4 minutes to get the older boys to defend their friend? Where were you?"

The Message: The Klei Chemda explains: Perhaps that is what the Torah means, a Jewish man

from his brothers. The Egyptian hit an Ivri and no one defended him. Why? Because he knew that the only way he could hit him and get away with it, was if the man was taken "from his brothers". If he was amongst his brothers surely they would have come to his aid. But the Egyptian knew better. The only way you can hit a Jew and get away with it is if the Jew is not with his brothers or amongst his brothers. It is only if he is... hit from his brothers

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Moses' second question to God at the burning bush was, Who are you? "So I will go to the Israelites and say, 'Your fathers' God sent me to you.' They will immediately ask me what His name is. What shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3: 13). God's reply, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, wrongly translated in almost every Christian Bible as something like "I am that I am," deserves an essay in its own right (I deal with it in my books Future Tense and The Great Partnership).

His first question, though, was, Mi anochi, "Who am I?" (Ex. 3: 11).

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" said Moses to God. "And how can I possibly get the Israelites out of Egypt?" On the surface the meaning is clear. Moses is asking two things. The first: who I am to be worthy of so great a mission? The second: how can I possibly succeed?

God answers the second. "Because I will be with you." You will succeed because I am not asking you to do it alone. I am not really asking you to do it at all. I will be doing it for you. I want you to be My representative, My mouthpiece, My emissary and My voice.

God never answered the first question. Perhaps in a strange way Moses answered himself. In Tanakh as a whole, the people who turn out to be the most worthy are the ones who deny they are worthy at all. The prophet Isaiah, when charged with his mission, said, 'I am a man of unclean lips' (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said, 'I cannot speak, for I am a child' (Jer. 1: 6). David, Israel's greatest king, echoed Moses' words, 'Who am I?' (2 Samuel 7: 18). Jonah, sent on a mission by God, tried to run away. According to Rashbam, Jacob was about to run away when he found his way blocked by the man/angel with whom he wrestled at night (Rashbam to Gen. 32: 23).

The heroes of the Bible are not figures from Greek or any other kind of myth. They are not people possessed of a sense of destiny, determined from an early age to achieve fame. They do not have what the Greeks called megalopsychia, a proper sense of their own worth, a gracious and lightly worn superiority. They did not go to Eton or Oxford. They were not born to rule. They were people who doubted their own abilities. There were times when they felt like giving up. Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah reached points of such despair that they prayed to die. They became heroes of the moral life against their will. There was work to be done – God told them so – and they did it. It is almost as if a sense of smallness is a sign of greatness. So God never answered Moses' question, "Why me?"

But there is another question within the question. "Who am I?" can be not just a question about worthiness. It can also be a question about identity. Moses, alone on Mount Horeb/Sinai,

summoned by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, is not just speaking to God when he says those words. He is also speaking to himself. "Who am I?"

There are two possible answers. The first: Moses is a prince of Egypt. He had been adopted as a baby by Pharaoh's daughter. He had grown up in the royal palace. He dressed like an Egyptian, looked and spoke like an Egyptian. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from some rough shepherds, they go back and tell their father, "An Egyptian saved us" (2: 19). His very name, Moses, was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2: 10). It was, presumably, an Egyptian name (in fact, Mses, as in Ramses, is the ancient Egyptian word for "child". The etymology given in the Torah, that Moses means "I drew him from the water," tells us what the word suggested to Hebrew speakers). So the first answer is that Moses was an Egyptian prince.

The second was that he was a Midianite. For, although he was Egyptian by upbringing, he had been forced to leave. He had made his home in Midian, married a Midianite woman Zipporah, daughter of a Midianite priest and was "content to live" there, quietly as a shepherd. We tend to forget that he spent many years there. He left Egypt as a young man and was already eighty years old at the start of his mission when he first stood before Pharaoh (Ex. 7: 7). He must have spent the overwhelming majority of his adult life in Midian, far away from the Israelites on the one hand and the Egyptians on the other. Moses was a Midianite.

So when Moses asks, "Who am I?" it is not just that he feels himself unworthy. He feels himself uninvolved. He may have been Jewish by birth, but he had

not suffered the fate of his people. He had not grown up as a Jew. He had not lived among Jews. He had good reason to doubt that the Israelites would even recognise him as one of them. How, then, could he become their leader? More penetratingly, why should he even think of becoming their leader? Their fate was not his. He was not part of it. He was not responsible for it. He did not suffer from it. He was not implicated in it.

What is more, the one time he had actually tried to intervene in their affairs – he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who had killed an Israelite slave, and the next day tried to stop two Israelites from fighting one another – his intervention was not welcomed. "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" they said to him. These are the first recorded words of an Israelite to Moses. He had not yet dreamed of being a leader and already his leadership was being challenged.

Consider, now, the choices Moses faced in his life. On the one hand he could have lived as a prince of Egypt, in luxury and at ease. That might have been his fate had he not intervened. Even afterward, having been forced to flee, he could have lived out his days quietly as a shepherd, at peace with the Midianite family into which he had married. It is not surprising that when God invited him to lead the Israelites to freedom, he resisted.

Why then did he accept? Why did God know that he was the man for the task? One hint is contained in the name he gave his first son. He called him Gershom because, he said, "I am a stranger in a foreign land" (2: 22). He did not feel at home in Midian. That was where he was but not who he was.

But the real clue is contained in an earlier verse, the prelude to his first intervention. "When Moses was grown, he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labour" (2: 11). These people were his people. He may have looked like an Egyptian but he knew that ultimately he was not. It was a transforming moment, not unlike when the Moabite Ruth said to her Israelite mother in law Naomi, "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1: 16). Ruth was un-Jewish by birth. Moses was un-Jewish by upbringing. But both knew that they, when they saw suffering and identified with the sufferer, they could not walk away.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called this a covenant of fate, brit goral. It lies at the heart of Jewish identity to this day. There are Jews who believe and those who don't. There are Jews who practise and those who don't. But there are few Jews indeed who, when their people are suffering, can walk away saying, This has nothing to do with me.

Maimonides, who defines this as "separating yourself from the community" (poresh mi-darkhei ha-tsibbur, Hilkhos Teshuva 3: 11), says that it is one of the sins for which you are denied a share in the world to come. This is what the Hagaddah means when it says of the wicked son that "because he excludes himself from the collective, he denies a fundamental principle of faith." What fundamental principle of faith? Faith in the collective fate and destiny of the Jewish people.

Who am I? asked Moses, but in his heart he knew the answer. I am not Moses the Egyptian or Moses the Midianite. When I see my people suffer I am, and cannot be other than, Moses the Jew.

And if that imposes responsibilities on me, then I must shoulder them. For I am who I am because my people are who they are.

That is Jewish identity, then and now.

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 Z'TL