

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

SHEMOT

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 1:1 - 2:3

JANUARY 20-21, 2017 23 TEBET 5777

DEDICATION: In memory of David ben Farha – My Great Uncle Dave Bibi

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Editors Notes It's Always In Your Hands

And they embittered their lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all their work that they worked with them with back breaking labor. Shemot 1:14
 During a class this week, the question was posed asking if our slavery in Egypt was inevitable. So I turned the question back to the table asking why one would believe Egypt was inevitable?

One quoted the verse, "And there was a famine in the land; and Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when he came near to enter to Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife, "Behold now, I know that you are a pretty woman to look upon. Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see you that they shall say, 'This is his wife' and they will kill me, but you they will keep alive. Say, I beg you, that you are my sister; that it may be well with me for your sake; and my soul shall live because of you." And it came to pass, that when Abram came to

Egypt, the Egyptians saw the woman that she was very pretty."

He recalled that together we had learned the words of the Ramban. "And know that Abraham sinned a great sin inadvertently, by bringing his wife the saint in a compromising situation, due to his fear that he be killed ... likewise leaving the land which he was commanded initially (to move to Israel) was a sin, for he should have trusted in God. Because of this action it was decreed that his descendants be exiled to Egypt at the hand of Pharaoh."

Another recalled that we had learned together the story of the First World War. Four kings — Amraphel, Arioch, Chedarlaomer and Tidal — suppressed a rebellion in the Siddim Valley (near the Dead Sea) by the kings of five city-states, among them Sodom and Gomorrah. Flushed with victory, the four kings march north and west, conquering all the Canaanite lands in their path, taking captives and booty. Abraham's nephew Lot who has been living in Sodom is among the captives. He and his family, along with their possessions, are being transported north by enemy ships to become slaves.

Abraham's immediate response is to marshal the 318 men of his household, chief among them his servant and head of his academy, Eliezer. Despite the odds and Amraphel's head start, Abraham resolves to rescue his nephew. Joined by Mamre and his brothers, Abraham's small force is armed and ready, and defeats the enemy.

The king of Sodom in appreciation begs Abraham, "please leave me the people and take all the booty for yourself." Abraham takes an oath ("I lift up my hand to Hashem, the G-d on High, who created Heaven and Earth") that he would not take even as much as a thread or a shoelace from the spoils of war so that the King of Sodom will not ever be able to say 'I made Avram wealthy'.

The Gemarah states based on this story: "Rabbi Abahu said in the name of Rabbi Elazar: For what reason was Avraham punished, that his descendants

would be enslaved in Egypt for two hundred and ten years? Because he pressed Torah Sages into service, as it is written, 'He led his trained servants, born to his house (meaning he took Eliezer and the boys in the Yeshiva from their studies to go to war. But is that so terrible? Aren't we supposed to rescue a hostage. The Talmud continues, Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he kept people from joining the monotheistic faith, as it is written: '[The king of Sodom said to Avraham:] Give me the people, and take the property for yourself.'"

Based on this and comments from the Zohar we can understand that we ended up in Egypt. Having taken the students from their studies, Abraham should have completed his task by bringing the citizens of Sedom into his household and camp and teaching them. Instead he released them and failed. Those same people multiplied their evil ways to the point of destruction. We are told that their souls returned in Abraham's children to be repaired through the trials of Egypt and ultimately to be redeemed.

And a third recalled the same chapter in the Talmud which lays the blame at Abraham's questioning of G-d that without children, who will become Abraham's heir.

We read in the Torah, "As the sun was setting, a deep sleep fell upon Avram; and behold, a dread of deep darkness fell upon him. And He (Hashem) said to Avram: "Know for sure that your descendants will be foreigners in a land that is not theirs. They will enslave them and oppress them [for] four hundred years ... The fourth generation will return here..."

Given the above, the table felt that Egypt was a given. And I must say that I was very proud that they all recalled what we had discussed previously.

Still, I suggested the following. Rabbi Abittan, z'sl always explained that a good prophecy is guaranteed, but a prophecy of puranut (negative) can be changed by the people. We see that Jonah predicted the downfall of Ninveh, yet the people repented and their future was changed. Thus it was possible to change the prophecy of Brit Ben HaBetarim of being enslaved for four hundred years.

Additionally the question has to be asked, four hundred years or four generations?

The Rabbi once suggested, VaYesheb Yaakov – Jacob came to dwell or rest. Certainly Jacob knew that that Abraham's descendants would be enslaved, abused, and eventually leave the place of their

oppression with great wealth. So why did he think he could rest?

But let's examine Jacob's life. Is it so far-fetched to consider that Jacob initially believed that this sequence had already occurred; that all these elements of God's promise had been fulfilled in his own life story? He must have thought that his oppression at the hands of Laban, and the years of slave-like labor which ended in his return to Israel with tremendous material wealth, had fulfilled God's words to Abraham. Once he made peace with Esav, all his adversaries had been neutralized. With his sons at his side (they were in fact the great grandchildren of Abraham or the fourth generation), Jacob was confident that the Messianic Age was dawning.

And then, "out of the blue," Jacob's worldview is derailed when he loses his son and his illusions of tranquility and fulfillment are shattered. The four generations are lost to four hundred years. What went wrong? In a new sefer called Birkat Yaakov, Rav Baruch Yaakov Gestetner explains: "At the time that Jacob returned to the land of Canaan from Laban's house, the possibility existed that the geulah would begin and the tribes would inherit and take possession of all the land of Israel. All this was on condition that there would be peace and harmony between them and that they accept Joseph as their king. But because the sold Joseph, it was decreed that they not inherit the land then, but that they be exiled to Egypt."

Rabbi Abittan would tell us that the reason we bring a goat (or a lamb) as the Pascal sacrifice was to remember that we ended up in Egypt through the sale of Joseph and the dipping of his coat into the blood of a goat. Everything depends on our actions.

And this is the lesson we must all remember. It's never a matter a pre-determination. It's really always in our own hands. We always have the opportunity to make or break, to fix or shatter. And that opportunity comes every day. Every day is a test and the reward for success is immeasurable. Let us go out and succeed!

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Summary of the Perasha

For those going away on vacation this week, there is an amazing opportunity for kidoosh Hashem. People will be in places where the residents there may not know Jewish people or may have a negative impression of them. Let us go out of our way to change that! Let us tell our kids what a great opportunity this is to represent the Jewish people in a good light. Be polite to the stewardess on the plane, say please and thank you the people helping you in your hotel, and let us go out of our way to really leave a positive impression on those we come in contact with!

Shemot- 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.

9 interesting / important Rashis in Parashat Shemot- Complete

- 1:22- The babies of the Mitsrim were also thrown into the water!
- 2:15- Datan and Aviran snitched on Moshe that he killed the Mitsriy
- 2:23c-Paroah didn't really die. He merely got saraat (here we see how the pesookim can say something clearly but everyone agrees the words should not be taken at face value given the context. This is lesson for elsewhere in the Torah where we don't explain the words at face value).
- 4:2,3,6- Hashem hints to Moshe that he spoke lashon hara about Benei Israel

4:10- Rashi is medayek that Hashem tried convincing Moshe (to lead Benei Israel) for 7 days!

4:14a/b- Moshe angered Hashem (when he refused at first to go lead Benei Israel) and some learn he was punished with losing the kehuna (to Aharon) because of it

4:24b- Why did the malach want to kill Moshe?

5:1- Why the zekenim did not accompany Moshe when he went to Paroah and what their punishment was by Har Sinai

5:4b- Here we see the Leviim never worked as slaves

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE "A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi." (Shemot 2:1)

Our parashah speaks about the marriage of Amram to Yochebed, the parents of Moshe. Actually, this was the second time they got married. Rashi explains: And he took a daughter of Levi, he had been separated from her because of the decree of Pharaoh, and he remarried her. This is the meaning of the verse, "And a man went," that is to say he followed the advice of his daughter, who said to him, "Your decree is more severe than that of Pharaoh. If Pharaoh decrees only against the newborn males, should you have decreed against the females as well?" And now in response to his daughter's criticism, he took his wife back.

Our Sages add that Amram was the leader of that generation and when he left his wife so did everyone else, and when he took her back, so did everyone else. This demonstrated how loyal the people were to their leader. We call this Emunat Hachamim (having faith in the Sages).

Rabbi Yitzchok Hisiger has a great story that illustrates the amazing power of the Hacham. Rav Chaim Kanievsky was recently visited by four brothers whose sister was in desperate need of a kidney transplant. Wishing to help their sister, the brothers went for testing to determine who is a match for their sister. The tests revealed that the four brothers were equally eligible.

The brothers agreed to visit Rav Chaim and have him draw lots to determine who would be the benefactor. The younger brother was hesitant about undergoing the process of kidney donation, but he agreed, for the benefit of his dear sister, to go with his brothers to Rav Chaim. As fate would have it, Rav Chaim's lottery determined that the younger brother should donate his kidney.

The brother became emotional. As tears filled his eyes he shared that he has a family of little children and was afraid to undergo the surgery. Everyone present was sure that Rav Chaim would

say to hold the lottery again without the inclusion of this brother.

To the surprise of all present, Rav Chaim was firm. "Since you were selected via the lottery, you should be the one to donate the kidney. And you won't lose or suffer because of it," added Rav Chaim. "This will be to your benefit." The brother finally agreed.

After removing the kidney, the doctors were shocked to find a malignant growth underneath, with metastasis to the pancreas. The doctors said that they would not have been able to identify the growth without removing the kidney. If some more time had passed, the growth would have expanded and posed a serious threat to the young man's life. As a result, a different brother donated his kidney. The younger brother had undergone the process to save his sister's life but had instead saved his own. Rabbi Reuven Semah

Anyone who reads the story of Moshe being placed in a basket in the river to prevent his death at the hands of the Egyptians, and then Pharaoh's own daughter saving him can't help but be amazed by the ways of Hashem! Pharaoh made many sweeping decrees to kill the baby boys at birth and afterwards solely to prevent the birth of the redeemer of the Jews. His own daughter saves Moshe from the river and brings him up on his father's lap! The verse in Tehillim says: *gauh vbnnu ceghk thv vrm ,g -* it is a time of affliction for the house of Jacob and from it he will be saved. The Rabbis tell us that the letters of the word *vbnn* spell also *invn-* from Haman. In the story of Purim we find a similar parallel. Haman made decrees to wipe out all the Jews but from his very own hands came the salvation! He erected a gallows to kill Mordechai and from his own hand came his downfall when he was hanged on those gallows!

This should give us hope and inspiration in our difficult times. The land of Israel is besieged by its enemies, and our people are going through tough times. But Hashem is preparing the time for redemption, and through the enemies' own hands will come the salvation for *ktrah og*. We must pray to Hashem with intensity and devotion to merit to see this very soon in our own days! Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Gratitude for Our First Grade Teacher
When G-d appears to Moshe at the burning bush and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand that he release Beneh Yisrael from bondage, Moshe initially refuses. He claims, "Lo Ish Debarim Anochi Gam Temol Gam Shilshom" – for a long time, he had a speech impediment which made him the wrong person for this job (4:10).

The Hida (Rav Haim Yosef David Azulai, 1724-1807), in his *Debarim Ahadim*, raises the simple question of why Moshe refused such a vital mission. Beneh Yisrael were suffering and dying under Egyptian tyranny, and G-d now decided to send Moshe to lead them to freedom. How could he refuse? Why would Moshe give "excuses" why he shouldn't accept this mission? What valid excuse could their possibly be to refuse to undertake such a vitally important responsibility?

The Hida's answer is remarkable. He explained that when Moshe says that he is not an "Ish Debarim" (literally, "a man of words"), he means not that he is physically incapable of this mission, but rather that it would be inappropriate for him to accept this task. Moshe owed an enormous debt of gratitude to Pharaoh and the Egyptian royal family, as he was raised by Pharaoh's daughter in the palace after she found him in the river. It was the Egyptian royal family that cared for Moshe after his mother had to place him in a basket in the river to hide him from those seeking to kill him. Moshe felt incapable of now turning around and becoming Pharaoh's adversary, demanding that he release his slaves and bringing plagues when he refused.

The Hida proceeded to explain that in truth, G-d chose Moshe for this role precisely because of the debt of gratitude that Moshe owed to Pharaoh. Pharaoh's crime against Beneh Yisrael began with ingratitude. The Torah tells that Pharaoh "did not know Yosef" (1:8), referring to his decision to ignore Yosef's immense contribution to the country. Yosef saved the Egyptians from famine, and worked to ensure that Egypt became wealthy and prosperous during the famine years, as other countries purchased grain from them. Yet, instead of rewarding Yosef's work by treating his people kindly, Pharaoh mistrusted them and subjected them to torture and torment. Pharaoh was the ultimate ingrate. And he was thus punished "measure for measure" by having Moshe, who was raised in the royal palace, confront him and demand in G-d's Name that he release the

slaves. As he was ungrateful to Yosef, it was specifically Moshe, somebody who owed him a debt of gratitude, who came against him.

In explaining his refusal to G-d, Moshe noted that he was not the right person for the job “Gam Mi'tmol Gam Mi'shilshom” – for a long time. This means that the kindness he had received from Pharaoh many years earlier prevented him from approaching Pharaoh. The fundamental trait of “Hakarat Ha'tob” – gratitude – requires us to remember kindnesses performed for us years earlier. Gratitude does not only mean thanking the person who held the door open for us or the waiter who served our food (though it certainly includes this), but also appreciating that which was done for us in the distant past – just as Moshe felt grateful to Pharaoh even decades later, when he was already a grown adult.

I once received a call from a woman asking me if I could speak at a function she was arranging. My busy schedule does not allow me to accept every invitation to speak, and so I was not initially prepared to agree. As we were talking, however, I told her that her name sounded familiar, and she reminded me that she was my first grade teacher, who taught me to read and write. I immediately accepted her invitation. How could I not? Did I not owe her an enormous debt of gratitude? She worked and toiled to teach me the basics that without which, I could not accomplish anything. The very least I could do was to agree to speak at her function.

We cannot even begin to imagine the gratitude we owe to our and our children's teachers, who work hard to educate their students for modest – to put it mildly – salaries and often under difficult conditions. Even years and decades later, we must never forget the vital role they played in our or our children's development.

This is also true of our parents, spouses, business associates and friends. Our mothers endured nine months of pregnancy, labor, sleepless nights and the countless other challenges of parenting so we could come into this world, grow and thrive. Do we not owe them our time and affection? Our spouses share their lives with us. Can we ever even begin to repay them?

Many Rabbis have taught that we are called “Yehudim” because expressing thanks – “Toda” – is the most basic trait by which we must live. It is only by developing our sense of gratitude to the people around us that we can begin to appreciate all that the Almighty does for us, and thus happily commit ourselves to fulfill His will and serve Him every day of our lives.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein OPTIMISM

It seems that the intrinsic nature of human beings is to be optimistic about the future and about life generally. This is a very strange phenomenon since it flies in the face of all of human experience and seeming reality. We are all aware that the rule, that whatever can go wrong will eventually go wrong, has had very few exceptions in human history.

Therefore, foreign policy or military preparedness based upon optimism as to the motives and circumstances of rival nations or the world order, must be deemed to be foolhardy and dangerous. We may hope for the best but we must always prepare for the worst. But, being too much of a pessimist leads to depression and offers a self-fulfilling prophecy of doom and sadness.

One of the unique qualities of the Jewish people over all of the millennia of its history has been the fact that no matter how bitter and disappointing our past experiences have been, we retain a sense of optimism regarding our future and that of humankind generally.

Judaism, as a faith and way of life, encourages optimism. It always points a way towards a better future and provides ample means for repentance for past errors and even sins. It treasures life itself as a gift that is continually bestowed upon us by our Creator. In the words of the Talmud – is it not sufficient for us that we are alive? I have always felt that it is this optimistic attitude that Judaism creates within us that it is part of the secret of Jewish survival against all odds and in spite of all the enemies that have attempted to destroy us.

I think that any realistic observer of the Jewish world today must realize that the greatest enemy to optimism regarding our present condition or future events is the incessant media pillorying of our accomplishments and our leaders. The negativity which dominates most of the mainstream media, here in Israel and throughout the world, dampens, if not destroys, any sense of optimism regarding our present or future.

I do not suggest that we be blind to our troubles and failings or that the future of the world and especially of the Middle East will be transformed overnight into a bed of roses. The problems are real, the dangers are mortal and caution must be the byword regarding any future policies and/or leaders. Yet, we should not succumb to the cynicism and negativity that permeates so much of our media. This affects all facets of our lives.

Part of the joy of seeing generations in one's own family is the sense of optimism that there is continuity and that, so to speak, later generations can redeem the errors of their ancestors. All of us feel that future generations will be able to cope with the problems of life in a better fashion than perhaps we were. That creates within us a resilient form of optimism.

The pinnacle of optimism in world affairs has been and is the restoration of the Jewish people's sovereignty in their ancient homeland. Even in the darkest days of exile, Jews believed that somehow the Jewish people would be able to return home and rebuild themselves in the Land of Israel. The song of the Jewish partisans of World War II was not one of revenge but rather one that stated that this is not our last road.

The Jewish world, in spite of all of its ongoing problems and difficulties, has rebuilt itself over the last seventy-five years in a manner that defies a reality. I am astounded by the Torah world; its numbers, options and institutions, that my grandchildren are able to participate in. They do so without giving it a second thought since they have no personal memory of how weak and few we were little more than a half-century ago.

But, I remember as a youth that somehow my teachers and mentors were always optimistic about the future and in spite of living under the shadow of the Holocaust and the difficulties facing the nascent State of Israel, they inspired their students to believe that great things were possible and that the future would create positive opportunities for the growth of Torah and the security of the Jewish people.

We are told that optimistic people are healthier and live longer lives than those who are unfortunately depressed. That alone should suffice to put us into a more optimistic frame of mind with regard to our future.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Who Am I?

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 am I, 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, Moses, 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 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 ZT'L