



שמות
Shmot

אשרינו | Ashreinu

Enhancing your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion



Take a Look Around

Rabbi Moshe Nachbar

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Yosef Scher ('21)

Adin Blumofe ('21)

Ashira Meyerowitz ('21)

Batsheva Shekhter ('20)

In this week's parsha, Shmot, we learn of the beginnings of our great leader, Moshe Rabbeinu. We all know the story of his birth, the famous details of the basket which contained him as he floated down

the Nile river, yet we do not know much about his upbringing. In a day and age in which we investigate to great lengths the upbringing of our leaders, we know so little about the details of our great leader's life. We often ask about our own mentors and leaders, what quality defines their leadership and when did they start exhibiting those character traits? The same questions can be asked here as well. When did Moshe, Prince of Egypt, become Moshe Rabbeinu, and why did he merit this leadership?

The Torah tells us (Shmot 2:11):

וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל-אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלֹתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מִכָּה אִישׁ-עֵבֶרִי מֵאֲחֵיו

“Some time after that, when Moshe had grown up, he went out to his kinsfolk and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his kinsmen.” The first detail we know about Moshe as he grows into an adult is “וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלֹתָם”, he “witnessed their labors.” Moshe, the great prince who had been waited on hand and foot his entire life, saw other people in their affliction and he took notice of it! One key to leadership is taking time to notice others in their situation; to see others in their world.

Similarly, after Moshe becomes a shepherd for his father in law, Yitro, the Torah tells us of the famous episode of the Burning Bush. The pesukim (3:2-3) state:

וַיֵּרָא מֵלֶאָה ה' אֵלָיו בְּלִבְתֹּאֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּנֵּה בֹעֵר בָּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינּוּ אֶכָּל:

“An angel of the Hashem appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed.”

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה-נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת-הַמְרָאָה הַגְּדֹל הַזֶּה מֵדֹעַ לֹא-יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה:

“Moshe said, “I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why doesn't the bush burn up?”

וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרְאֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הַנְּבִי:

“And Hashem saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush: “Moshe! Moshe!” He answered, “Here I am.”

The Torah once again emphasizes this trait of Moshe, that he made an active decision to look and see this great event, the Burning Bush. At that point, Hashem took notice of Moshe in the same way Moshe took notice of the world around him. Moshe “turning aside” to see the miracle of Hashem is the beginning of Moshe’s appointment as leader of our people. In a world where we so often become distracted and disconnected, we can learn the great lesson of Moshe Rabbeinu, that the first step to being a leader is noticing the world around us. To look around and be grateful, or to look around and notice an issue, it all stems from the trait of seeing and noticing.

Insurance is the Best Policy

Yosef Scher (‘21)

In this week’s parsha, Shmot, the Jewish people’s redemption slowly begins. However, before discussing the redemption, one must go back to the beginning, when the Jews were in Egypt suffering as slaves to Pharaoh. This new Pharaoh treated his slaves awfully, by making them work terribly hard. In addition to making them do tiresome, laborious tasks, Pharaoh also created horrible decrees. He declared to his people and to the Jewish midwives that all Jewish boys must be thrown into the Nile River. After this decree was established, the Jews cried out to Hashem. The Torah cites Hashem’s reaction with a strange usage of words:

“וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹקִים, אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיֵּדַע, אֱלֹקִים”

“Hashem saw Bnei Yisrael, and Hashem knew” (2:25). Countless mefarshim question God’s response to Bnei Yisrael’s cries: Hashem saw their suffering, but what did Hashem know? By the strange language in the pasuk, it sounds like the Torah is saying that Hashem now knew that Bnei Yisrael were suffering. However, we know that this cannot be the case, because Hashem knows everything -- so He must have already known about their suffering! So what does it mean when the pasuk said that Hashem saw their suffering and He knew? It means that Hashem was not going to ignore the cries of his people again. He was now going to finally do something about their suffering.

To help us answer the question of why Hashem decides to ignore us at certain times or in certain situations, we can look to a mashal. Once upon a time, there was a

family, the Baruchs, who lived in Texas. Next door to the Baruchs was their neighbor, Mr. Jimmy. One night, a massive rainstorm hit Texas and flooded many of the homes. Both houses were damaged significantly. Luckily for the Baruchs, they had Bob’s Flood Insurance, and so they immediately put in an insurance claim for the damage. Thankfully, Bob’s Flood Insurance was able to restore the house to its previous condition. However, after the storm hit Mr. Jimmy’s house, he didn’t know what to do. He asked the Baruchs what they did, and when they told him that they had contacted Bob’s Flood Insurance and their problem was fixed, he ran to the phone and dialed the company right away. Mr. Jimmy explained what had happened and expected his home to be restored. After several days of waiting, he called again asking why the adjuster hadn’t come out to fix his house. The customer service representative asked Mr. Jimmy if he had purchased an insurance policy. Mr. Jimmy was confused about what that was, and so he hung up and went over to the Baruchs’ house for clarification. The Baruchs explained that they had purchased an insurance policy and that every month they paid Bob’s Flood Insurance \$200 to cover any flood damage to their home. After hearing this, Mr. Jimmy understood and went to his house to secure an insurance policy with Bob’s Flood Insurance, so that he would be ready for next time.

The nimshal of this story is that Hashem is like the insurance company. If you buy into His plan, then He will take care of you. No matter how much trouble you are in, He will always be there to save you. However, you must buy the policy first, which means keeping mitzvot and keeping the Torah. If you do this, then Hashem will always take care of you. The explanation of the pasuk in our parsha is as follows: Hashem knew that Bnei Yisrael were suffering, but the problem was that Bnei Yisrael had sunk to a very low spiritual level in Mitzrayim. Since they were not keeping the Torah, Hashem ignored their cries for help. However, when they later called out to be saved, Hashem saw that they had done teshuva and so He was ready to save them. Bnei Yisrael had secured a valuable insurance policy.

Importance of Responsibility

Adin Blumofe (‘21)

The story of Moshe and the significance of his entire family in the development of our religion gives rise to a critically important question. Why did this family get

the privilege of shaping the Jewish nation in the way that they did? Every single heir of Amram instrumentally framed Judaism. Miriam laid the cornerstone for the Jewish monarchy. She married into the tribe of Yehuda, to Calev, and gave rise to David Hamelech and all his successors, including the Mashiach. Aharon was picked as the incipient source for the entire priestly class. He was also the first Kohen Gadol, the highest theological position in Judaism. Then there is Moshe Rabbeinu, the most important person in our religion's 4,000 year old history. He freed the Jews and disseminated our founding document, the Torah, which set the legal code for our entire nation, forever. The family of Amram had the honor of forming the theological, political, and judicial base for our entire religion. The question must be asked: "why them?"

To understand why Hashem (possibly) chose the house of Amram as the progenitors of our religion, Amram's importance must be fully comprehended. Amram was the leader of the tribe of Levi. Because Levi was the only tribe not to fall for Pharaoh's trickery, they never became slaves. This meant that in all legal practicalities they were free people. As Levi was free, this meant they were entitled to freedom of movement.

In my opinion, with their freedom maybe they could have left Egypt and gone back to Canaan to live in their promised land, but they did not. The entire tribe of Levi stayed in Egypt with their brothers as they went through slavery. They never abandoned the rest of Jewish people, when it would have been so easy. Har Sinai had not occurred yet, meaning we were 12 independent tribes instead of a single nation. Levi could have focused on themselves, yet they chose to take care for their suppressed and repressed brothers. For this incredible act of devotion and unity to the nation and the fledgling religion, they were granted the reward of being able to form and delineate the religion. As Amram was the head of the tribe of Levi, he inherited the rewards on behalf of the entire tribe. Such responsibility, *acharayut*, demonstrates how "baseless *achdut*" leads to "based rewards." Just as it might not seem rational or pragmatic to care for your fellow 'yid' at the expense of your own happiness and life, the heavenly rewards more than make up for it. That is, the corporeal differences in what we have and could have had become insignificant. We might miss out when we look at the world through polarized glasses, ones that focuses on our nation and fellow Jews with *ahava* and care, but the ultimate reward was so much greater.

Staying Spiritually Strong During Hardship

Ashira Meyerowitz ('21)

Parshat Shmot, translated as 'Names,' begins by listing the names of Yaakov's sons. The Torah lists the sons' names individually to demonstrate that each Jew has a unique purpose and value. Although our names reveal nothing about ourselves, according to Kabbalah, a person's name is the channel of spirituality running through them. Our true essence is not merely through the personality we have developed, but also through our names. The Jewish people, despite their enslavement, remained true to their Jewish values and morals.

The exile in Egypt in Parshat Shmot was not only a physical exile, but also a spiritual exile. The physical exile included terrible back-breaking labor and enslavement, while the spiritual exile encompassed cultural enslavement. Many Jews assimilated and succumbed to the language, culture, and ideas of the Egyptians. However, despite the hardships of the time, many Jews did not forget their heritage; instead, they demonstrated complete faith in Hashem. Although many Jews assimilated into the Egyptian culture, Hashem still counted the Jews, showing His eternal love for us.

When Moshe and Aharon showed Pharaoh the first signs, Pharaoh made the labor even harder for the Jews. Instead of being provided with the materials to do the extremely difficult labor, he made the Jews find their own materials and still reach the same quota as before. Since no Egyptians helped the Jews with finding materials, the entire Egyptian population is punished. Pharaoh also forced Jews to be officers over the enslaved Jews, and those Jewish officers were commanded to whip the Jews if they did not meet the quota. The Jewish officers took the Jews' beatings and showed the important quality of mercy, and were therefore rewarded to be part of the 70 *zekeinim*. We can learn from the Jewish officers to take pride in our religion and Jewish names and to stay true to our beliefs and values of helping one another during times of difficulty.

Righteous Among The Nations

Batsheva Shekhter ('20)

We all learn from a young age about the story of Shifra and Puah, the two midwives who refused to follow Pharaoh's command to kill all Jewish baby boys. We are typically taught Rashi's interpretation of the pasuk, which is based off of the midrash that the two midwives were Yocheved and Miriam, two women who risked their lives to save Jewish baby boys and were rewarded with descendants of Kohanim, Leviim, and kings. This approach assumes that the midwives were Jewish women who were willing to put their lives on the line for the future of their nation.

However, the pasuk in Shmot 1:15 seems very vague:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילֵדוֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הָאֵחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשְּׁנִיית פּוּעָה

“And the king of Egypt spoke to the two Hebrew midwives; one was named Shifra and one was named Puah.”

The Torah only gives us the names of the two women and the fact that they were Hebrew midwives. A major question discussed by many mefarshim is: were the midwives described in the pasuk Jewish midwives or midwives for the Jewish women? It seems that there are more possible interpretations to this part of the story than the single view that has been ingrained within us for most of our lives. The Abarbanel suggests that the midwives were Egyptian women who helped deliver Jewish babies. He explains that Pharaoh would not trust Jewish midwives to kill the Jewish baby boys, so he relied on Egyptian ones. The Kli Yakar claims that since the pasuk later states that the midwives were God-fearing, the midwives were understood to be Egyptian, because it would be obvious (and therefore not need to be said) that Jewish midwives feared Hashem. Regardless of the reasons why the mefarshim believed the midwives were Egyptian, if they were in fact Egyptian, these women ignored Pharaoh's commands and chose to save another nation. The midwives decided to help continue a nation that was being persecuted by the rest of their country.

These two interpretations of the passuk teach us the importance of the acts of righteous gentiles. Without these two women, the Jewish nation would have most likely been killed off in Egypt. Ranging from a European couple who hid Jews in their basement during the Holocaust, to a Pittsburgh police officer who was murdered while trying to save Jews during the massacre at the Tree of Life synagogue, to the Arab Israelis who serve in the IDF and sacrifice their lives for Jews living in Israel, we have seen numerous times throughout history that there are non-Jews who are willing to help us and whose efforts have impacted and will always impact the Jewish nation.

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