

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Shemos

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

BELOVED STAR

Sefas Emes

"And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael..." (1:1)

To tell us how beloved they were, that they were compared to the stars. (Rashi)

Jews must know that G-d loves us, and that just as He made the stars shine in the dark night, so too, He created the Jews to spread His light to the darkest and lowliest places on earth.

REMEMBER WHO LOVES YOU

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt..." (1:1)

Rashi comments that the reason Hashem counted Bnei Yisrael again, even though they were already counted in last week's parshah, was to show how much Hashem loves the Jewish people and how precious we are to Him.

The Sefas Emes inquires as to whom exactly Hashem was declaring His love for Klal Yisrael.

The Sefas Emes explains that Hashem was conveying it to us, the Jewish people, wanting to ensure that we are aware of His eternal love for us.

We often forget that, through thick and thin, Hashem loves us. We may feel distant at times and retreat from our relationship with Him. Imagine how much happier and elevated we would be in our spiritual growth if we were mindful of how much Hashem loves us. Wouldn't we be so much more motivated to demonstrate our love for Hashem, by intensifying our observance of mitzvos and commitment to His Torah, knowing that He loves us?

Let us incorporate this message of the Sefas Emes into our homes, lives, and communities. Doing so will surely allow us to feel Hashem's love and reciprocate that love with everything that we do.

LOYAL LINEAGE

HaDerash V'Halyun

"Every man came with his household..." (1:1)

As a rule, when people move from a little village whose inhabitants are imbued with Torah and the fear of G-d into a big city where irreligion and immorality are rampant, they may remain unchanged, having been raised in the ways of Judaism from childhood. Their children, however, will take to the ways of the city and cast off their religion.

The Torah makes it a point to tell us that this did not happen with the children of our patriarch Yaakov. They had departed Canaan - where they had led a pious and G-dly life - and they had settled in the impure and G-dless land of Egypt. Yet they remained "every man with his household." Their home life did not change, and the children remained close to the ways of their fathers and mothers.

GATES OF REPENTANCE

Rebbe Nachman

"And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt..." (1:1)

The final letters of the first five words of this verse, ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים - "And these are the names of the sons of Israel who came," spell Tehillim (תהלים, Psalms). The final letters of the next five words of the verse, מצרימה את יעקב איש וביתו - "to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household," spell teshuvah (תשובה, repentance).

Moreover, the names of Yaakov's twelve sons are composed of forty-nine letters, corresponding to the Forty-Nine Gates of Repentance.

All of this indicates that when a person recites Tehillim, his prayerful words are directed to the specific Gate of Repentance that he requires. (See Likutey Moharan II, 73)

SAVED BY THE NAME

Chiddushei HaRim

“And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael...” (1:1)

Though the people would be in dire straits while in the Diaspora, their existence would always be assured. This guarantee was made because they would keep their Jewish names, as they did in Egypt.

STAYING TRUE TO TRADITION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And these are the names of Bnei Yisrael who came to Egypt...” (1:1)

The Jews' physical exile was their forced slavery; their spiritual exile was their psychological enslavement to their host's culture. Although many Jews assimilated because of their exile, others struggled to retain their Jewish identity, refusing to give up their Jewish names and language because of their faith in their destiny.

It was only after revealing their inner identity in response to the challenge of exile that the Jewish people could receive the Torah. The purpose of the Torah is to teach us how to bring Divine consciousness into the most mundane aspects of life, even those that initially oppose G-dliness. In exile, the Jewish people learned how to overcome even these forces.

The same applies to our present exile: holding on tenaciously to our traditions - even those that appear to be unimportant - will hasten our redemption. The challenges that we overcome purify and prepare us for the exalted Divine revelations that will accompany the imminent, final Redemption. (Torah Ohr 49a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

REMAINING UNCHANGED

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“Yosef was in Egypt.” (1:5)

Why does the verse emphasize that Yosef was in Egypt? The Torah could have simply said that Yosef was “there.”

The reason seems to be the following:

The Torah wishes to inform us that even while in Egypt, Yosef did not change his name. Although Pharaoh had given him the name “Tafnas Pane'ach” (Bereishis 41:45), Yosef continued to call himself Yosef. Moreover, we find that Pharaoh himself referred to Yosef with that name, as it says, “Go to Yosef, and that which he tells you, you should do” (Bereishis 41:55).

For in the merit of three things the Jewish people were redeemed, and one was the fact that the Jewish people did not change their names while living in Egypt (Bamidbar Rabbah 13:19; Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer 48). For this reason, the verse emphasizes, “Yosef was in Egypt,” as if to say, “Yosef remained Yosef, even while in Egypt.”

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE LOVE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“They [Yaakov's descendants] numbered seventy.” (1:5)

The Torah first lists Yaakov's descendants by name and then tells us how many there were. A name reflects an entity's unique identity in contrast to other entities in the same group. In contrast, when we count the entities in a group, we focus on their common denominator - the fact that they are all members of the same group. Their individual identities disappear.

Thus, by both listing the Jewish people by name and counting them, G-d indicated that He loves them both on account of each individual's unique personality and on account of their common Jewish identity - their shared, basic Jewish consciousness.

By stating His love both for every individual Jew and for the Jewish people as a whole before they descended into the bitter exile of spiritual and physical servitude, G-d indicated that when we suffer, it does not mean that He does not love us any less. Although hidden, His love for us is always present and will eventually be revealed as well. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, pp. 7-8; vol. 3, p. 844) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“Yosef, his brothers and the entire generation had passed away.” (1:6)

The Ohr HaChaim asks why the Torah doesn't simply state that the entire generation passed away. Why does the Torah need to specify each group that died?

The Ohr HaChaim answers that the Torah is teaching us that the Egyptians had so much respect for not only Yosef, but also the brothers and the entire generation. Given the amount of prestige that they assigned to each of these groups, the Egyptians waited until they all died before enslaving the Jewish people.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz (Sichos Mussar) provides an alternative perspective which is incredibly powerful. He explains that the reason the Egyptians couldn't enslave the generation that had died was not just because of how the Egyptians viewed them, but rather because of how the Jewish people viewed themselves. Yosef and his brothers had self-esteem and self-confidence. They knew who they were and what they were capable of. They possessed self-dignity and self-worth and would never have allowed anyone to oppress them. It is for this reason that the Egyptians waited until this generation passed away before enslaving the Jewish people.

In life, part of the reason we fail to live out our dreams is because we forget who we are and what we are capable of. We fall short of our own expectations because we don't think we can achieve greatness. Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz is teaching us that success in all facets of our

lives depends on how we see ourselves. If we have the right attitude and confidence in who we can be, and recognize our talents and capabilities, then we are sure to bring out the best in ourselves and those around us!

UNITED AT OUR SOURCE

Rebbe Nachman

“The Jewish people were fertile and prolific. They increased and grew very, very mighty.” (1:7)

The six Hebrew words describing the Jews' fertility allude to the Jewish women giving birth to sextuplets. (Rashi)

Each set of sextuplets was united at its source; thus, causing harm to even one of the siblings could harm them all. This can be understood more broadly as indicating that all Jews are united at their source. (See Likutey Moharan I, 69)

DIDN'T GET THE MEMO

Imrei Aish

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Yosef.” (1:8)

Had the new king known Yosef, his history, and his past, he would have known that all attempts made to harm Yosef - whether by his brothers or by Potiphar - actually led to a rise in Yosef's fame and good fortune. Thus, he would have feared oppressing Yosef's descendants, the Hebrews, lest, by oppressing them, he hastened their redemption and liberation.

GETTING TO KNOW YOSEF

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Yosef.” (1:8)

Some say he was literally a new king who did not know Yosef. Others say he was the old king who pretended not to recall the good that Yosef had done for the Egyptians and renewed his decrees against the Jews. (Rashi)

The evil forces always try to entrap a person and prevent him from doing good. These forces are symbolized by Mitzrayim (Egypt), which represents Meitzarim (narrow straits, constrictions) - i.e., the suffering and difficulties that result from sin. Whether Egypt is ruled by a new king or an old one, the result is the same: sometimes new obstacles arise to challenge one's good intentions to serve G-d, and other times new decrees and statements challenging G-d inhibit people from recognizing Him. In either case, the forces of evil pretend not to “know Yosef” - they do not recognize the tzaddik and his ability to assist people in their quest for G-dliness. Instead, they seek to enslave and repress people with “hard labor” - these are the hard questions people have regarding their devotions and their difficulties in attaining clear answers (Zohar).

Yet the Jews survived because of the midwives Shifra and Pu'ah (Yocheved and Miriam). Yocheved was called Shifra (שפּרה) because she would meshaper (משפּר, beautify) the infants, and Miriam was called Pu'ah (פּוּעָה) because she would Po'eh (פּוּעָה, breathe life into) the newborns by cooing and speaking to them softly and kindly (Rashi). The midwives represent the tzaddikim who constantly find merit in the Jewish people and speak to them with compassion and direction, helping them strengthen themselves despite all the difficulties they face.

Pharaoh decreed to kill the male infants and keep the females alive. The son/male represents joy, which Pharaoh tries to repress so that one cannot draw any vitality into his devotions. The daughter/female represents the aspect of depression (Mishlei 5:5 - “Her feet descend unto death”), which Pharaoh tries to heighten so that he can dominate his subjects. But the midwives - the tzaddikim - ignore Pharaoh's attempts and keep joy alive, bringing freshness and vitality to those who search for G-dliness. (Likutey Halakhhot III, p. 79a)

DAILY BATTLE

Skoyla Rebbe

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Yosef.” (1:8)

The evil inclination renews each day with new traps to overpower a person. Even the righteous are not exempt in the fight to conquer the evil inclination, for they too, do not know the stumbling blocks put forth each day. That is the implication of “And there arose a new king,” as noted in the Zohar. The evil inclination is an old, wise king who renews his techniques every day and does not recognize the righteousness of a righteous person. Therefore, it is imperative for all to conquer the evil inclination every day.

UNITED STRENGTH

Reb Yisrael of Ruzhin

“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and mightier than us.” (1:9)

As long as we remain united as a people, we will always be strong and steadfast.

ELICITING DIVINE WILL

Belzer Rebbe

“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and mightier than us.” (1:9)

Why is that after the reading of the Torah on Mondays and Thursdays four paragraphs are read beginning with “And it shall be Thy will,” but the last paragraph begins with the words “Our brothers” (a plea for G-d's mercy on all suffering Jews). The answer is that when we pray as a united people in times of distress, it automatically becomes a time of G-d's will.

DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Rebbe Nachman

“And they embittered their lives with hard work.” (1:14)

Kashah (קשה, hard) alludes to Kushiyyot (קושיות, questions). The main hardship of the Jews' bondage in Egypt consisted of their struggles with faith in G-d, Divine justice, and the like. (See Likutey Moharan II, 46)

SHARING THE BURDEN

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And they embittered their lives with hard work.” (1:14)

Although we are not explicitly told the reason why Amram and Yocheved named their daughter Miriam, we often find in Tanach that people would base their children's names on events that occurred in their lives. Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that Miriam's name was a reference to the bitter times that were facing the Jewish People at that time (the root of the name Miriam is mar - bitter). In fact, the Shelah explains that for this very reason, Yocheved's brother, M'rari (from the same root: mar) was so named.

The question on this is that Amram and Yocheved were from the Tribe of Levi who were not subjected to slavery like the rest of the Jewish People (Rashi, Shemos 5:4). If so, why would they name their child with a depiction of bitterness when they themselves did not face any bitter subjugation? The Shelah answers that naming their children in such a way enabled them to join in the suffering of their brethren. Specifically, the gesture of naming their children in such a way would serve as a constant reminder of the importance of this principle.

Although it is no longer a prevalent custom to create a name for a child based on contemporary circumstances, we nevertheless find many examples of great people “joining in” the Jewish People's pain in recent history. For instance, the Chofetz Chaim was known to sleep on the floor during the First World War because he knew that many Jewish People had lost their homes in the fighting. More recently, from the moment that Rav Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz heard about the atrocities of the Holocaust, he never again ate meat.

One can ask, though: What is the point of causing ourselves to suffer; even if we would sleep on the floor every night, what would it achieve? To answer this, Rav Frand related in the name of the Alter of Kelm that the more we are pained by the Jewish People's suffering, the more Hashem becomes pained, so to speak, and thus commits Himself to alleviate their pain. Thus, just by sharing in others' misfortune, we are actually contributing to alleviating their woes. We can only begin to do this, though, if we first recognize that the Jewish People are one unit. As the Kli Yakar (Devarim 29:9) explains so beautifully: We are all part of the same body, and when one limb gets hurt, the entire body feels the pain.

KICKBACKS NOT ACCEPTED

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

“And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them.” (1:22)

Parshas Shemos tells of the heroism of Shifra and Pu'ah – Bnei Yisrael's midwives who defied Pharaoh's command to kill every newborn boy. In reward for their courageous decision to keep the boys alive, the Torah tells, יעש להם בתים - G-d “made homes for them” (1:21).

Rashi, based on the Gemara in Maseches Sotah, explains the word בתים (homes) in this pasuk as a reference to dynasties. These women were Yocheved and Miriam - Moshe's mother and sister - and the dynasties of the Kehuna, Leviya, and kingship descended from them. Yocheved was Levi's daughter, and thus the kohanim and Leviim descended from her, while the royal line of Dovid HaMelech descended from Miriam.

Why was this the reward for the midwives' heroism? G-d normally rewards מידה כנגד המידה, in a manner that resembles the deed that was performed. Why was the midwives' refusal to kill the infants rewarded specifically with the dynasties of leadership?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Megged Yosef, answers this question by noting the previous pasuk, וייטב אלוקים ומאד - “G-d brought goodness upon the midwives; the nation multiplied and became exceedingly numerous.” The Torah seems to interrupt the story of G-d's reward to the midwives by telling us of the nation's continued, rapid population growth.

Rav Sorotzkin explains that the phrase וירב העם ויעצמו מאד implies that this was the midwives' greatest reward - seeing Bnei Yisrael's sustained growth. Their sole concern was the wellbeing of their people; they were not interested at all in any sort of personal reward. The satisfaction of seeing that וירב העם ויעצמו מאד, that Bnei Yisrael continued growing, with more and more healthy babies being born, provided them with more joy and satisfaction than any reward could have possibly provided.

When Hashem saw the midwives' selflessness, how their display of courage and self-sacrifice was intended solely for the benefit of the nation, without any ulterior motives, and without any desire for fame or recognition, יעש להם בתים - He decided that the nation's leadership would descend from these women.

The most important quality of a leader is sincerity, a genuine devotion to the people, without any interest in “kickbacks” or prestige. A true leader feels rewarded by seeing his success, by witnessing the benefit he brings to the people under his charge. He does not need any feedback, praise, compliments or public recognition. And so Hashem wanted the leadership of Bnei Yisrael to emerge from Shifra and Pu'ah, the two women who wanted nothing in return for their self-sacrifice other than the joy of seeing the fruits of their labor.

There are many “thankless jobs” that involve a great deal of work, and tend to invite complaints and criticism, instead of compliments and praise. Personally, in my experience, I am privileged to receive warm, positive feedback for my efforts, but many rabbis do not. The role of gabbai in shul is notorious for its thanklessness; the gabbai puts in time and effort to ensure that everything runs smoothly but receives only complaints when he forgot to give someone aliya, without ever receiving a compliment. When one chooses to serve in any sort of leadership position, he must go into it expecting nothing in return. These roles demand an attitude like Shifra and Pu’ah’s - seeing the success of one’s work as enough of a reward, such that no fame or recognition is needed.

CIVILIZED CORRUPTION

Sichos Tzaddikim

“And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, ‘Every son that is born you shall throw into the river...’” (1:22)

The Targum Onkelos renders this command as “Every son that is born to Jewish people you shall throw into the river.”

Pharaoh purposely stated his decree in general terms, commanding that every baby born in Egypt should be thrown into the river for it would hardly have been proper for so highly civilized a nation as Egypt to discriminate so brazenly against the Hebrews.

But the officials charged with the enforcement of this law had been confidentially instructed that it was applicable to Hebrew infants only.

DROWNING IN EGYPT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, ‘Every son that is born you shall throw into the river, but let every girl live.’” (1:22)

By instructing his people to “let every girl live,” Pharaoh meant that the Jewish girls should be raised as Egyptians. He thus decreed that the boys be killed physically, and the girls be killed spiritually. The decree to throw the boys into the Nile also alludes to immersing the Jews in Egyptian culture, for the Egyptians worshipped the Nile as the source of their livelihood and culture.

Egypt is the prototype of all exiles. In all exiles, the ruling culture urges us to raise our children in its ways, promising that this is the path to attain material and social success. As in Egypt, resisting these promises and ensuring that our children grow up cherishing the Torah's values is what will guarantee their material, social, and spiritual happiness, as well as their freedom from the bonds of exile. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, p. 111) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ALL PART OF HIS MASTER PLAN

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, ‘Every son that is born you shall throw into the river...’” (1:22)

Rashi comments that Pharaoh included the Egyptians in this decree because his astrologers had informed him that the savior of the Jews had been born, but they couldn't tell if he was a Jew or Egyptian. Therefore, Pharaoh mandated that Egyptians would be expected to kill their boys just like the Jews had to.

The Steipler Gaon (Birchas Peretz) identifies an incredible lesson from this episode.

Pharaoh thought that he would outsmart Hashem by decreeing that all boys, Egyptians and Jews alike, must be killed. Pharaoh was hoping to ensure that the savior of Klal Yisrael would meet his demise. Yet, Moshe didn't just survive; he was raised right under Pharaoh's nose - in his very own palace!

Not only was the decree unsuccessful, but the very person who instituted the decree was responsible for undermining its purpose and caring for the future leader and savior of Klal Yisrael.

The Steipler is teaching us that Hashem has a plan with a perspective that only He is privy to. We often implicitly question that plan and wonder why things unfold in a manner that we don't agree with. We try to alter the plan, presuming we know better. The Torah is teaching us that we must trust Hashem. We need to realize that despite our valiant efforts, Hashem has a master plan, which He will not deviate from, and it will ultimately serve us best. With this in mind, we are sure to live more productive and meaningful lives filled with happiness.

WOMEN OF REDEMPTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“A Levite man went and married a daughter of Levi.” (2:1)

Referring to the Jewish women's efforts to conceive and raise children despite Pharaoh's decree, our Sages state (Sotah 11b) that “in the merit of the righteous women of that generation our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt.”

In the present exile, too, we will hasten the advent of the Redemption by ignoring societal pressure to “drown” our children in materialistic culture, raising them instead to be a generation of Jews faithful to G-d's Torah.

Once again, the efforts of the women of our generation in this regard will be decisive - as the Sages also state (Yalkut Shimoni, Rus, 606), “The future generations will be redeemed only in the merit of the righteous women of those generations.” (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 112-113) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MODEL OF HUMILITY

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"A Levite man went and married a daughter of Levi." (2:1)

The Torah tells of the marriage of Moshe's parents - Amram and Yocheved. The Gemara in Maseches Sotah (12a) teaches that this actually refers to Amram and Yocheved's second wedding.

After Pharaoh decreed that all the newborn boys should be cast into the river, Amram decided to divorce his wife, figuring that there was no longer any reason to beget children. As he was the religious leader of his time, everyone else followed suit, and divorced.

But Amram was then confronted by his daughter, Miriam, who was just a young girl - around four years old - at the time. She challenged her father's decision, claiming that his move was even worse than Pharaoh's decree. After all, Pharaoh decreed death only upon the boys, whereas Amram was preventing the birth of both boys and girls. Moreover, Pharaoh decreed only physical death, while Amram was causing infants to never be born and thus not have the opportunity to earn a share in the next world. Amram accepted his daughter's criticism, and married Yocheved a second time. Once again, the rest of the nation followed his example, and remarried.

Amram here sets for us an inspiring, and ever so critical, model of humility.

Let us imagine a prominent leader who sits for hours with his committee to discuss the situation and decide upon the appropriate course of action. Finally, a decision is reached. The leader goes home and speaks about the decision with his family, and his four-year-old daughter starts asking questions. She argues that the decision was wrong, explaining why she thinks it is a terrible idea. We can easily imagine the man gently and lovingly running his hand along her cheeks, smiling, and saying, "My sweet girl, thank you for your concern, but the committee decided that this is the best thing to do." He would think it is cute that his daughter chimes in, but would not take her input all that seriously... We could hardly imagine him reconvening the committee to announce that he changed his mind after hearing what his four-year-old had to say about the issue...

Amram shows us the importance of humbly accepting criticism and ideas from other people, no matter who they are. We have what to learn and gain from all people - yes, even young children.

Too often, our ego gets in the way of our growth process. We feel too proud to change our behavior or our opinions because of what we hear from somebody whom we regard as inferior to us. If Amram, the religious leader of Bnei Yisrael at the time, could learn from his four-year-old daughter, then we certainly have much to learn from all people, no matter who they are.

REMEMBERING THE REEDS

Rabbi Mordechai Benet

"...and she put the child therein, and laid it in the reeds by the river's edge." (2:3)

Moshe was born on the seventh day of Adar and Yocheved hid him for three months (Shemos 2:2). Hence, he was placed into the river on the seventh day of Sivan. It was on the seventh of Sivan, too, that many years later Moshe was to receive the Torah on Har Sinai. Moshe's miraculous rescue in infancy was in the merit of this crucial future task (Gemara, Sotah). The Jewish custom on Shavuot to decorate homes with green plants similar to those growing on riverbanks recalls the reeds among which, on that seventh day of Sivan, Yocheved gently placed the basket bearing her infant son.

FAR FROM THE PHYSICAL

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"His sister stood from afar to know what would be done to him." (2:4)

The explanation of this verse will also clarify the verse (Yirmiyahu 31:2) "From afar G-d appeared to me." When the worlds remain attached to their physicality, perfect service of G-d is unattainable to them, but when they distance themselves and extricate themselves from their physicality, they are able to serve G-d perfectly.

This, then, is what the Torah alludes to by the use of the term "from afar." It implies that when a person distances himself from physicality, G-d appears to him. Similarly, this is the implication in the verse "His sister stood from afar..." The word for "sister" (אחות) connotes "attachment," related to the word for "join together" (מאחה), referring here to our attachment to our physicality. This "attachment" stands afar - is removed from its inherent physicality.

IT'S WITHIN REACH

Kotzker Rebbe

"The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her maidservant to fetch it." (2:5)

Our Rabbis expounded that "her maidservant" refers to her arm. According to their interpretation, her forearm became lengthened by many amos (cubits). (Rashi)

How was it possible for her to stretch her hand across such a great distance and retrieve the basket? We learn from this that if one wishes to reach a goal, one should not be concerned with stumbling blocks. A person should stretch out his hand and eventually the goal will be reached.

EXTENDING OUR HAND

Reb Yitzchak of Vorka

"The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe in the Nile, while her maidens walked along the Nile. She spied the basket among the reeds and sent her maidservant to fetch it." (2:5)

Our Rabbis expounded that "her maidservant" refers to her arm. According to their interpretation, her forearm became lengthened by many amos (cubits). (Rashi)

When Pharaoh's daughter stretched out her hand to reach Moshe's watery cradle, her arm miraculously increased in length. We learn from her actions that when a person sincerely wishes to help another, he shouldn't stop to think if it "pays" or if it is even feasible. Rather, he must immediately do his part and "extend his hand" to his fellow man.

THERE'S ALWAYS HOPE

Rabbi Mordechai Benet

"She [Basya] opened it [the basket], she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, 'This must be a Hebrew child.'" (2:6)

How did Pharaoh's daughter know that the child that she was pulling from the river was Jewish just from hearing him cry? Because a Jewish cry is unique; together with despair it contains an element of hope. A Jew is always hopeful, even when he cries.

CONSTANT RENEWAL

Reb Noson of Breslov

"She [Basya] opened it [the basket], she saw that it was a child, a boy crying. She took pity on it and said, 'This must be a Hebrew child.'" (2:6)

Na'ar (boy) literally means "young man." Moshe always looked at himself as a young man, especially when he cried out to G-d. Even when he grew old, he always renewed himself, as it is written, "His eyes had not dimmed, nor his natural vigor abated" (Devarim 34:7). Moshe's great strength, his power of continuous renewal, enabled him to attain such lofty heights. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 77a)

HOLY MOUTH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"His sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, 'Shall I go and summon for you a Hebrew nurse, who will nurse the child for you?'" (2:7)

Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach quoted the words of the Rashba (Rabbeinu Shlomo ben Aderet), who rules from the fact that Moshe would not nurse from an Egyptian woman that no Jewish child should ever be nursed by a gentile.

"But why?" asked R' Shach. "Chazal tell us that the reason why Moshe would not nurse from an Egyptian was because his mouth was destined to speak to the Shechinah. This reasoning can't be applied to all Jewish children, so how does the Rashba learn this halachah from here?"

Exclaimed R' Shach with great emotion, "When a Jew davens each day, or even makes a brachah, he says 'Blessed are You, Hashem.' He is, in fact, talking directly to the Almighty - no different than Moshe Rabbeinu! Thus, his mouth is holy as well."

RAISING PRINCES AND PRINCESSES

Rabbi Efrem Goldberg

"When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, who made him her son" (2:10)

The story that unfolds in Parshas Shemos is truly remarkable. Pharaoh was determined to prevent Am Yisrael from growing, and wanted to ensure that no child would emerge as the leader who would bring the nation to freedom. As it turned out, the prophet who would lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt - Moshe Rabbeinu - was actually raised in Pharaoh's home. When Moshe was an infant, his mother placed him in a basket in the Nile River to hide him from the Egyptian authorities who were ordered to kill him, and the baby was discovered by none other than Pharaoh's daughter. She brought baby Moshe into her home and adopted him as her child. And thus, Pharaoh ended up raising the future leader of Am Yisrael in his home.

A number of commentators raised the question of why God arranged the events in this manner. Why was it important for Moshe to be raised in Pharaoh's palace?

Some commentators offer a very meaningful explanation, one which has very important implications for how we raise and educate our children. They explain that it was important for the leader of Bnei Yisrael to have been raised in an environment of royalty, and not as a slave. After 210 years of excruciating and humiliating bondage, Bnei Yisrael lived with a slave mentality, without self-confidence, without the strength or courage to stand up for what is right, to do what needed to be done. The leader had to be somebody with a "regal" sense of self-worth, with confidence and determination. As we know, Moshe had to repeatedly confront Pharaoh, who remained defiant and brazen in his rejection of the demand to release Bnei Yisrael. Only somebody who had been raised in royalty, who grew up with a sense of his own importance and worth, could have the courage and confidence to repeatedly and forcefully confront a defiant monarch.

The lesson for us is that we must raise our children in "palaces," as princes and princesses. We must make it clear to them that we are the beloved children of Hashem, King of the world, and, as such, as we are all princes, we are all royalty.

This does not mean that they should feel entitled to whatever they want, or that they can and should demand special privileges. Rather, it means that they have special obligations and responsibilities. Royalty requires conducting ourselves appropriately, with a standard of morality and dignity befitting a royal family. If children grow up without this awareness of their royal status, they will not bother maintaining these high standards. They will not have the self-esteem and self-confidence needed to confront the "Pharaohs" that they encounter, to resist pressure and overcome challenges.

We must endeavor to raise our children in a "regal" environment and imbue them with an awareness of their special royal status, so they will live the way that God's princes and princesses are expected to live.

OUR INDISPENSABLE WEAPON

Avnei Ezel

"...and [Moshe] saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brethren. And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he struck down the Egyptian..." (2:11-12)

With what did Moshe slay him? According to one interpretation, Moshe killed him with his bare fist. Another interpretation noted that he slew him with a shovel, and still another interpretation explained that he slew him with the power of the Ineffable Name. (Midrash)

Some think that we can conquer our oppressors with physical force. Others contend that we can overpower them with tools we use for work. But the fact is that only with the help of G-d's word and with faith in His Name can we overcome the many oppressors who hit us with their whips. Without the aid of the Ineffable Name, both the fist and the shovel are of no use.

WORTH THE RISK

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[Moshe] struck down the Egyptian." (2:12)

At the time when he killed the taskmaster, Moshe was being groomed for greatness in Pharaoh's household. He nonetheless risked his life and his comfortable and privileged royal lifestyle in order to help his kinsmen.

Similarly, we should not hesitate to risk our own spiritual, social, or material comfort in order to help rescue our fellows who are suffering under spiritual or material bondage. (Sichot Kodesh 5740, vol. 1, pp. 784-788) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MANNING UP AGAINST EVIL

Avnei Ezel

"[And he said,] 'Who made you a ruler and judge over us?'" (2:14)

It is the way of wicked people that if someone attempts to stop their evil conduct, they question his right and authority to do so and cry out, "Who appointed you a judge and authority over us?" But when it comes to fighting evil, each and every one of us has the right, and indeed the duty, to help all one can, for "in a place where there are no men, try to be a man" (Pirkei Avos 2:5).

IN G-D WE TRUST

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Pharaoh heard about the incident." (2:15)

Moshe should have trusted in G-d's protection, but because he did not, he forfeited it. Pharaoh therefore heard about the incident and sought to kill him. Had Moshe not been afraid - and not voiced this fear - nothing would have happened.

Similarly, when we face obstacles in fulfilling our Divine mission, we should realize that we can earn G-d's helpful intervention by trusting that He will help us. Feeling confident of G-d's help does not mean that we should not take whatever natural steps are necessary to avoid trouble or to solve our problems; it merely means that we should trust G-d to crown our efforts with success.

Our sages teach us that it was in the merit of their confidence in G-d that the Jews were delivered from Egypt. Similarly, our confidence that G-d will redeem us from the present exile will itself hasten the Redemption. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 1-6, based on Chovos HaLevavos, Sha'ar HaBitachon 2-3) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CREDITING HASHEM

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

"They said, 'An Egyptian saved us from the hands of the shepherds.'" (2:19)

After the word spread that Moshe had killed an Egyptian, Moshe was forced to flee from Egypt, and he arrived in Midyan. There he witnessed the scene of shepherds harassing Yisro's seven daughters at a well. Moshe drove the shepherds away and drew water for the young women's herds.

When Yisro's daughters returned home, they reported to their father what had happened, telling him, איש מצרי - "An Egyptian man saved us from the hands of the shepherds." The Midrash (Shemos Rabbah 1:32) raises the question of why Yisro's daughters described Moshe as an איש מצרי - "an Egyptian man." Was this who Moshe was? Did he really dress as an Egyptian?

The Midrash answers by offering a fascinating explanation of this pasuk. After Moshe rescued the women, they started praising him, calling him a hero. Moshe responded, אותו מצרי שהרגתי הוא הציל אתכם - "That Egyptian that I killed, he saved you." Rather than take credit for rescuing them, Moshe directed their attention

to the extraordinary sequence of events that led him to be present at the well so that he could help them. It was only because of the איש מצרי, the Egyptian man whom Moshe had observed beating a slave, and whom he then proceeded to kill, that Moshe ended up fleeing to Midyan and was thus in a position to rescue Yisro's daughters from the harassment of the local shepherds. And thus, איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרועים - the women were saved by the Egyptian man whom Moshe had killed, on account of which he needed to run to Midyan.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck infers from the Midrash an important lesson about appreciating G-d's role in everything we accomplish. So many different things need to fall into place for us to succeed in anything, for us to achieve anything. If we find ourselves in a position to help somebody, or to do something meaningful, we should not take all the credit. We need to open our eyes and appreciate all that Hashem has done to enable us to achieve all that we are able to achieve, all the assistance that He grants, and His having placed us in a position to accomplish the great things that we are privileged to accomplish. We cannot take all the credit for our achievements; we must feel a keen sense of gratitude for all Hashem has done to enable us to do all that we do.

NOT THE ORDINARY

Avnei Ezel

"They said, 'An Egyptian saved us from the hands of the shepherds...' And [Yisro] said to his daughters, 'Where is he?'" (2:19-20)

Certainly, Yisro thought, a man who risks his life to defend and to rescue people in distress cannot be an ordinary Egyptian, even if he appeared like one. It is really worth going out and looking at such an Egyptian.

GREAT GOALS, GREAT CHALLENGES

Rebbe Nachman

"He [Yisro] gave Moshe his daughter Tziporah as a wife." (2:21)

The greater a person, the farther away is what he seeks. Therefore Moshe, because of his greatness, could find his wife only in Midian, a faraway land (see Likutey Moharan II, 70). As one works to attain his goals, he must necessarily face opposition or barriers. The greater the person, the greater the goal - and hence, the greater the obstacles.

THE STARTING POINT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of their work, and they cried out; and their outcry from the work rose to Hashem." (2:23)

Any exodus from trouble or suffering begins with one's cries and prayers to G-d. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 332)

COMPLETE RELIANCE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And the king of Egypt died, and the Children of Israel groaned because of their work, and they cried out; and their outcry from the work rose to Hashem." (2:23)

This verse implies that only now, once Pharaoh had died, did the Jewish People cry out to Hashem - at which point their prayer was immediately accepted.

Were they not suffering immeasurably before this point? Surely they cried rivers of tears over their anguish, so how can the verse imply that this cry was a unique experience? And why was this specific cry the one that rose to Hashem?

The Rashbam answers that up until this point, the Jewish People hoped and believed that their suffering was only due to Pharaoh's wickedness, and once he died, their plight would improve, and they would be freed from his sadistic decrees. However, when they saw that their situation did not improve after Pharaoh's death, they lost all hope of salvation.

Their cry, described in this verse, therefore, was one of complete despair, after seeing no possible natural resolution. As such, this was their first sincere cry to Hashem (see Shemos Rabbah 21:5). For only now they realized that they could rely on nothing and no one else but Hashem. Such a prayer, explains the Rashbam, Hashem does not turn away empty-handed!

Similarly, when we approach Hashem for our needs, we should turn to Him with the full knowledge and trust that only He can provide for us. If we pray in such a way then we can rest assured that our prayers will be heard.

Rav Ephraim Wachsman provided this lesson in the following analogy: A tzedakah collector comes to shul and sticks out his hand to everyone he approaches. Each person gives him some small change, and even when he reaches the wealthy congregants, they also reach into their pockets and produce a dollar or two. This isn't the way to approach a wealthy person for a donation, Rav Wachsman explained. Instead, the collector should make an appointment and prepare a presentation for the wealthy person. He should explain why he needs the money and inform the man that he isn't able to approach anyone else for this kind of thing, and he is relying on him and him alone. When a person of means hears this - and knows it to be true - then he is much more willing to help.

So too, when we stand before Hashem and pray, it is possible that the words coming from our mouth will warrant a small return. After all, we are sticking out our hand to Hashem in anticipation, and He will likely give something to us. However, if we approach Hashem in a way that shows Him that we are only relying on Him because we know that we have no one else to turn to and no one else who can possibly help us, then Hashem will hear our prayers and surely provide us with what we need.

KNOWN FOR ENDURANCE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"G-d saw the Children of Israel, and G-d knew..." (2:25)

G-d saw how the Jews clung to their faith and how - despite the suffering and humiliation they had to endure - they had retained their Jewish traits, discarding neither their traditional dress nor their language. Therefore, G-d "knew" them and resolved to deliver them.

FOCUSING ON THE GOOD

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"G-d saw the Children of Israel, and G-d knew..." (2:25)

In other words, G-d foresaw that the Jewish people would receive the Torah, although presently they were idol worshippers (Shemos Rabbah 21:7; Zohar 2:170b). This is alluded to by the word "knew," which implies connection, as in the verse (Bereishis 4:1) "Adam knew Chava, his wife."

"G-d knew" thus means, G-d connected Himself to their future good deeds, ignoring their future bad ones.

TENDING HASHEM'S FLOCK

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe was tending Yisro's sheep." (3:1)

Yisro was an intelligent person (having previously served as an advisor to Pharaoh and as the leader of Midian), He surely discerned Moshe's intelligence and knew about his aristocratic status, both as the son of Amram and as a prince in Pharaoh's court. It seems strange, then, that Yisro should have put Moshe to work as a shepherd.

But Yisro sensed - consciously or subconsciously - that Moshe was destined to lead G-d's "flock" and therefore - intentionally or unintentionally - employed him in a way that would foster his innate leadership traits in preparation for his mission.

A lesson we can learn from this is that even those of us who feel that their social stature and intellectual training entitle them to advanced career positions should not consider it beneath their dignity to teach young children or those at the beginning of their quest for Jewish knowledge - G-d's "flock."

Rather, like Moshe, we should not be haughty about our qualifications. On the contrary, tending G-d's flock is the best preparation for an eventual position of leadership, should Divine providence lead us in this direction. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 8, pp. 250-251) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

TRUE WISDOM

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"He came to the mountain of G-d, to Chorev." (3:1)

Chorev, another name for Mount Sinai, is a symbol of wisdom, as explained in R' Avraham ben David's introduction to Sefer Yetzirah (1:11, 4:5 - see there).

Thus, the allusion to attaining wisdom, and the essence of wisdom is the awe of G-d, as the verse says, "The beginning of wisdom is the awe of G-d" (Tehillim 111:10).

This, then, is the deeper meaning of the verse (Shemos 3:6) "He was afraid to look toward G-d." At Chorev, the place of wisdom, Moshe experienced the awe of G-d.

FROM STRESSING TO BLESSING

Baal Shem Tov

"An angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush." (3:2)

Why did G-d's emissary appear within a prickly plant? Rashi clarifies: "Specifically a thorn bush, and not another kind of shrub, in order to convey the message that I am with you in distress" (Tehillim 91:14).

In its broadest meaning, the term tzarah, "distress," includes the entire physical existence. It is referred to as tzarah because it is a dimension of extreme constraint (tzar).

The upper realms of existence are spiritual, and they are unconstrained by comparison, basking in the overt revelation of G-d's Infinite Light. They and their contents are therefore expansive.

In this world, however, the Infinite Light expresses itself through the dense veil of nature. The result is a dimension of extreme spiritual constraint and concealment. As a consequence, our physical world becomes a place of tzarah, distress.

But it was not meant to remain that way:

G-d's intention in creating the world in such a manner was to give room for our input. Through our Divine service of Torah study and observing the mitzvos, we transform the tzarah (צרה), "distress," into tzohar (צהר), "luminance." We illuminate the universe with the light of Torah and mitzvos, so that Divine revelation can replace the concealment.

PROTECTIVE FIRE

Rebbe Nachman

"An angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush." (3:2)

Malakh (angel) also means "messenger," and refers to a messenger of spirituality within a person's heart.

This "angel" is the fervor within one's heart, a fire of justice that consumes the forces of evil that try to overwhelm him and protects his chamber of holiness. (See Likutey Moharan I, 59:1)

FIRE OF HOLINESS

Baal Shem Tov

“An angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush.” (3:2)

Torah scholars are likened to fruit-bearing trees, whereas simple Jews are likened to trees and bushes that do not bear fruit.

When Hashem spoke to Moshe, the flame of fire appeared in a burning bush - likened to a simple Jew. This teaches us that although the simple Jew may not understand the meaning behind performing the commandments or the words he says in prayer, he still has the fire of holiness burning in his heart.

“The bush was not consumed” - this is the fire within each Jew which can never be extinguished.

TAKING THE INITIATIVE

Rabbi Meshulam Dovid Soloveitchik

“[When he saw the burning bush,] Moshe said, ‘Let me turn away and go over there to behold this remarkable sight.’” (3:3)

It would appear that had Moshe not taken the initiative to investigate the burning bush, Hashem would not have spoken to him.

Even though the ultimate goal of this miracle was for the good of the Jewish people, it never would have happened without human initiative.

ASPIRING FOR MORE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[When he saw the burning bush,] Moshe said, ‘Let me turn away and go over there to behold this remarkable sight.’” (3:3)

When Moshe said these words, he was voicing the aspiration that is the foundation of any relationship with G-d. This aspiration is what makes us human, i.e., beings that strive to rise above animal existence in search of intellectual depth and spiritual self-refinement.

This ambition enables us to focus our intellects in solitary meditation and climb the ladder of Divine consciousness. Whatever level of consciousness we achieve, we always aspire to ascend further. The force of this aspiration unlocks all our human potential, strengthening our intellect, emotions, and senses. We are constantly blessed with new insight and understanding, which in turn lead us toward a deeper relationship with G-d.

Thus, as stated in the next verse, it was only after “G-d saw that [Moshe] had turned aside to look” that “He called to him from the midst of the bush.” (Likutei Diburim 138b-139a) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

EVADING SPIRITUAL THORNS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“An angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame of fire from within the thorn bush. He looked - behold! The bush was burning in the fire but was not being consumed.” (3:2)

Moshe saw that the thorns of the bush were burning, yet they were not consumed. The fire represents G-dliness - as in “My Word is like fire” (Yirmiyahu 23:29) - and the thorns represent the obstacles to spirituality. How is it, wondered Moshe, that even when G-dliness is revealed, the obstacles to spirituality remain? How can one find G-dliness even in a “thorny bush” - i.e., even in the midst of confusion and suffering?

When Moshe drew close to the bush, G-d told him, “Remove your shoes.” Shoes represent the body (Tikkuney Zohar # 12, p. 27a). One cannot hope to overcome the obstacles unless he transcends his bodily desires. (Likutei Halakhot IV, p. 242a)

ALWAYS AVAILABLE

Yampoler Rebbe

“[And G-d said,] ‘Do not come closer to here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.’” (3:5)

This pasuk teaches us that Hashem is saying that when one wishes to become a servant of G-d, one should not rationalize his circumstances. One should know that no matter what the conditions are, he can always worship G-d and become His servant.

This is what Hashem meant when He said to Moshe, “Do not come closer to here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.” When you come near, when you wish to be close to G-d, then do it! Do not seek a way out; “take off your shoes” - remove your excuses. No matter where one is, the ground is always holy.

HEIGHTENED SENSITIVITY

Reb Shlomo Ephraim Luntzitz

“[And G-d said,] ‘Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.’” (3:5)

When Moshe Rabbeinu saw the burning bush, Hashem told him to remove his shoes.

When one wears shoes, he can step on small stones and pebbles, hardly detecting anything. However, when one walks barefoot, he feels every tiny rock and thorn and it hurts.

Thus, Moshe, the future leader of Klal Yisrael, was told to take off his shoes, for a leader of his generation had to feel the pain of his people and understand their travails in order to properly lead them.

EVERY MOMENT IS A HOLY MOMENT

Chofetz Chaim

"[And G-d said,] 'Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.'" (3:5)

Each situation in which one finds himself at that moment is holy. Hashem expects one to serve Him in every situation and environment despite the difficulties involved.

REMOVING THE BARRIERS

Malbim

"[And G-d said,] 'Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.'" (3:5)

As a shoe is to a foot, the body is merely the outer garment of the human soul. Hence, in commanding Moshe to remove his shoes, G-d meant to tell him, "If you would like to understand G-d's ways and reach the level at which you'll be able to behold the Revelation of G-d, first cast off the forces and urges of the body that conceal the soul within. Only then will you be able to attain holiness."

HUMBLE INTROSPECTION

Avnei Ezel

"And Moshe said to G-d, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh? Am I able to bring the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt?'" (3:11)

Mashal: The Ohr Pnei Moshe, R' Moshe of Pshevarsk zt'l, was a great scholar, but his real strength lay in tefillah. R' Moshe once lodged at an inn where a misnaged was staying. In the morning, the misnaged said his prayers and then sat down to study Gemara. R' Moshe, however, made extensive preparations before praying. He had not even begun when the other had long since finished. The misnaged looked at him askance and asked, "Why do you need so much preparation before davening Shacharis?"

R' Moshe replied, "The truth is that I envy you, being able to pray on time and then sit down to study. But what can I do? I begin my day with 'Modeh ani' and a flood of thoughts overcome me: Who am 'I'? And Who is the 'living and enduring King'? And what is my 'soul'? These thoughts lead me to ask myself if the 'I' is worthy of approaching the 'living and enduring King' and if I truly merit the return of my soul each day. They strain my conscience, gnaw away at my brain and I am unable to begin the very first prayer. Small wonder that it takes me so long to begin praying!"

Nimshal: When Moshe was charged with the mission of leading Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, he responded by asking, "Who am I?" Moshe, in his great humility, could not fathom that he was a worthy conduit of Hashem. Yet it was for this reason that he was chosen.

CHOSEN FOR HUMILITY

Avnei Ezel

"And Moshe said to G-d, 'Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh...?' And He said, 'Certainly I will be with you, and this shall be the token for you, that I have sent you. When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain.'" (3:11-12)

Moshe, humble man that he was, did not consider himself worthy of being the deliverer of the Jewish people and asked, "Who am I?"

G-d answered Moshe that his very question was proof of his fitness for the task. "And this" this very question of yours, "Who am I?" - "shall be the token for you," that I have chosen you to perform this task.

G-d calls only on those who do not think highly of themselves. Thus, of all the mountains, He chose lowly Har Sinai on which to give the Torah to the Jewish people, for while the higher mountains boasted of their height, Har Sinai remained lowly in its own eyes. This was why G-d told Moshe: "When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain." The fact that I will give you the Torah on this mountain - on this small and lowly mountain - rather than on the mighty mountains should be a sign for you as well, to demonstrate to you that because you, too, have remained lowly and humble in your own eyes you are worthy of being the deliverer of your people.

[Among the worthy and noted disciples of the Rabbi of Lublin were two brothers. One enjoyed a lot of respect and many Chassidim flocked to his home, while the other never had any visitors seek his counsel. One day, this man enviously asked his popular brother: "We are both equal in learning and good deeds, and we have both studied under one master. Why, then, should all the Chassidim crowd around you while no one ever comes to me?"

"Believe me, dear brother," the other replied. "I have often asked myself the same question. Why, really, should they all come to me and not to you? But I think that the answer may be found in the questions we ask. I do not understand why all the Chassidim should come to me of all people for advice, and you do not understand why they do not turn to you. There you have the reason why the Chassidim come to me rather than to you."]

CHANNELED BY THE TZADDIK

Reb Noson of Breslov

"When you have brought forth the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain.'" (3:12)

Moshe asked, "What merit do they have to be redeemed?" G-d replied, "They will receive the Torah on this very mountain." (Rashi)

A person draws his main life force from the Torah, through the tzaddik. (See Likutey Moharan I, 8)

When Moshe asked G-d how the Jews could be redeemed, he wanted to know from where they would derive their life force (since the Torah had not yet been given).

G-d answered that just as the people would receive their life force from the Torah when it was given through Moshe, the tzaddik will always channel that life force. Thus, Moshe was the only one who could bring the Ten Plagues upon the Egyptians. Since the tzaddik subjugates his will completely to G-d's Will, he can bend both life and nature to G-d's Will.

The Ten Plagues affected every part of creation - mineral, vegetable, animal and man - and manipulated all four elements: earth (e.g., the lice), water (e.g., the blood), air (the wind which brought the locusts) and fire (e.g., the hail). The Ten Plagues demonstrated that G-d is in total control of nature and that the vitality of all things is drawn through the tzaddik. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 170)

LIFTING THEM UP

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Moshe to tell the people], 'I have indeed remembered you and what is being done to you in Egypt.'" (3:16)

Even though the Jews had sunk to a dangerously low spiritual state, even serving idols, G-d did not tell Moshe to rebuke them or to warn them that if they do not mend their ways their exile will continue. Rather, G-d instructed him to remind them of the merit of their forbears and to announce that in this merit and in the merit of their suffering they were about to be redeemed. Only much later, when he had an alternative for them - a commandment for them to fulfill - did Moshe tell the Jews to stop serving idols.

Similarly, the most effective way to draw the hearts of our fellow Jews closer to G-d is by first showing them the beauty of their heritage and uplifting them with the promise of the Redemption. (Sefer HaSichot 5751, vol. 1, pp. 250, 252)

SPIRITUAL MILK AND HONEY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d said to Moshe,] 'I am going to take [the Jewish people] out from the affliction of Egypt... to a land flowing with milk and honey.'" (3:17)

Spiritual "exile" means being deprived of the full use of all our abilities and potential in cultivating our relationship with G-d - either by outside forces or by our own materialism. Conversely, "redemption" means the freedom to express the full gamut of our abilities and put them to use, blending and developing them to express our inherent Divinity. When our relationship with G-d is allowed to blossom and grow, it eventually taps the innermost longings of our heart.

Allegorically, the land represents our relationship with G-d. The sweetness of milk represents the delight we experience in comprehending as much of G-d's nature as we can; the even greater sweetness of honey represents the delight we experience in feeling so close to G-d that we become one with Him.

G-d therefore describes the type of "land" that He seeks to bring His people to as "flowing with milk and honey." He has blessed our relationship with Him to be infused with both these aspects of delight. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5686, pp. 246-248) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

GAINING FAVOR

Imrei Kohen

"And I will give this people favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. And it shall come to pass that when you go, you shall not go empty handed." (3:21)

He who does not go "empty handed," i.e., devoid of Torah knowledge, will find favor even in the eyes of his enemies.

Even his enemies must respect him for "if G-d is pleased with the conduct of a man, even his enemies must make peace with him" (Mishlei 16:7).

EVEN WITH LITTLE FAITH

Sefas Emes

"[Moshe said,] 'They will not believe me.'" (4:1)

Why would Moshe want to cast aspersions on the Israelites?

Moshe knew that the Israelites' exile in Egypt was the beginning of the redemption process. He also understood that when the Jews would be in the Diaspora, there would be times when their faith was not strong. Moshe wanted to hear from Hashem that even now while the Israelites had little faith, Hashem would redeem them - and so too, the same would happen in the future.

USING EVIL FOR GOOD

Pardes Yosef

"...and he put forth his hand and laid hold of it..." (4:4)

The serpent symbolizes the evil impulse that induces us to do wrong. The Torah teaches us to "lay hold" of that evil impulse and use its strength for the good of Judaism, as the Sages put it, "And you shall love Hashem your G-d with all your heart," which means with both your impulses: good and evil.

Even the evil forces at work within us must be altered and used in G-d's service.

The same thought is stressed in Pirkei Avos (4:1): "Who is strong? One who subdues one's (evil) impulse." Heroes are those who have conquered their evil impulse and made it serve good purposes.

BALANCING ACT

Pardes Yosef

“And Hashem said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ And he said, ‘A rod.’ He said, ‘Cast it on the ground.’ And he cast it on the ground, and it became a serpent and Moshe fled from before it. And Hashem said to Moshe, ‘Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail...’” (4:2-4)

G-d asked Moshe, “What is that in your hand?” What power have you in your hand to wield as Israel's leader? And Moshe replied, “A rod,” implying that he would lead the Jewish people with the rod of stern discipline.

G-d then explained to Moshe that rigid discipline is not the right way. Such a method turns into an insidious serpent, as it were; the people resent it, and eventually revolt against their leaders. It was only when Moshe “fled from before it,” i.e., when he abandoned a stern approach entirely and resolved to lead his people with humility alone, that G-d said to him: “Put out your hand and grasp it by the tail.” There will be times when it will become necessary for you to make use of the rod, when kindness must be reinforced with discipline, for without some discipline no leadership can endure.

For this reason, the Torah, while commanding the Jewish rulers not to be arrogant (“that his heart not be lifted up above his brethren” - Devarim 17:20), insists that no ruler may give up any part of the honor due him, “so that his fear may be upon you.”

OVERCOMING LAZINESS

Malbim

“...and he put his hand into his bosom, and behold, his hand was leprous, as white as snow.” (4:6)

Humans were made to act and achieve, to work and create. One who is negligent and too lazy to do what one should do is as if one had caused actual destruction (“one who is slack in one's work is a brother to one who destroys” - Mishlei 18:9), for indolence bears the seeds of death and destruction.

If the hand lies hidden “in the bosom” and does nothing, the result is leprosy, which is tantamount to death. But, as soon as the hand is removed from there so that it may work and create, it will be restored to life, “and it returned to be like his flesh” (Shemos 4:7).

CHOSEN FROM ABOVE

Derashos HaRan

“For I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue.” (4:10)

Moshe was destined to be a stammerer in order to make it known that the influence he wielded, and the fact that he gave the Torah to the Jewish people, were not due to any oratorical talent of his, but only to the spirit of prophetic vision with which he was endowed, for “the Shechinah spoke from within his throat.”

PROPER EATING

Rebbe Nachman

“‘Who gave man a mouth?’ G-d said to him.” (4:11)

“Who gave man a mouth?” may be read as a question and answer: “Who gave man his human nature? His mouth!” (i.e., his ability to eat in a proper, holy fashion). (See Likutey Moharan II, 77)

GETTING STARTED

Reb Noson of Breslov

“‘Please, my Lord!’ he said. ‘Send whoever You will send.’” (4:12)

When Moshe saw the burning bush, he drew close to it, wondering why it was burning yet wasn't consumed. He understood the hint that the fire represented the Torah, which has the power to consume the thorns - i.e., the obstacles and opposition that the Jewish nation would face as they sought to conquer their enemies and enter the Holy Land.

However, the fire did not consume the bush itself because the time had not yet come for the Jews to triumph over their enemies. G-d told Moshe, “You must first remove your shoes... the Land is holy” (Shemos 3:5). Meaning: When the sanctity of the Land will be revealed and the Temple will stand forever, then you can overcome your enemies completely. Until that time, you will not be able to do so.

Understanding that he would not merit to lead the Jews into the Holy Land and see the Temple built, Moshe refused the mission. “Send whoever You will send,” he declared, “since I won't be able to complete the mission.” But G-d made him go anyway. “If you don't, there is no one else who can redeem them,” G-d explained. “Though you cannot complete the mitzvah, is that a reason not to start it?” (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 224a)

SIGN OF A TRUE LEADER

Reb Noson of Breslov

“When he [Aharon] sees you, he will be happy in his heart.” (4:14)

Aharon was the leader of the Jews in Egypt during Moshe's absence. Yet when G-d told him that Moshe would now take over the leadership, Aharon went to greet Moshe with great joy. He humbled himself before Moshe and willingly passed on the mantle of leadership. Through his actions, Aharon showed that he was a true leader, one who had the best interests of his people at heart. In fact, the entire Exodus hinged on Aharon's humility. The Jews in Egypt knew Aharon and trusted him; had he hesitated in accepting Moshe, the Jews would never have accepted Moshe either. Then the Exodus could not have taken place, because only Moshe was great enough to help the Jews leave Egypt.

SHARED JOY

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"The anger of Hashem flared up against Moshe and He said, 'Behold! Is there not Aharon your brother, the Levi?'" (4:14)

This verse relates that Hashem's anger "flared up" against Moshe after he had spent an entire week arguing that he was not suitable to lead the Jewish People out of Egypt (see Rashi, Shemos 4:10). The Gemara relates that according to Rebbe Yehoshua ben Karcha, every time the Torah uses the phrase "became angry" it implies that a degree of punishment will follow - with one exception - this verse, where Moshe never received any degree of punishment. However, Rebbe Shimon ben Yochai argues and claims that even here, Moshe received a punishment, as it says in the next words of the verse "Behold! Is there not Aharon your brother the Levi?" How could the Torah call Aharon a Levi, he was a Kohen? With these words, Hashem was saying to Moshe "I had initially intended for you to be the Kohen and for Aharon to be the Levi, but now you are to be the Levi and he shall be the Kohen" (Zevachim 102a).

The problem is that even Rebbe Yehoshua ben Karcha would agree that this punishment did indeed take place, because it states their roles explicitly in Divrei HaYamim (the verses state that Aharon was distinguished from Moshe to perform the Holy service as a Kohen, whereas Moshe was called a Levi). If so, how could he claim that Moshe did not suffer any degree of punishment?

The answer, explains Rav Chaim Shmuelevits is found in the following Medrash (Medrash Rabbah, Vayikra 3:6):

"When Moshe saw the oil flowing down Aharon's beard, he was as happy as if it was flowing down his own beard."

We see from here that Moshe's joy at his brother's inauguration as Kohen Gadol was so immense that it was as if Moshe himself had been appointed to this position. This means that Moshe would not have been even the tiniest bit happier if he had become Kohen Gadol himself, such was his happiness at Aharon's achievement.

From this Medrash, Rebbe Yehoshua ben Karcha's position makes perfect sense. Even though Moshe lost out on becoming a Kohen in favor of Aharon, it was not considered a punishment, because his joy over Aharon's success was so immense that he felt as if he had been appointed Kohen Gadol.

TAKING A FIRM STAND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe took the staff of G-d in his hand." (4:20)

Even though, as we will see, Moshe gave Pharaoh the honor due a king and spoke to him respectfully, he made no compromises in his demands concerning the people's spiritual and physical needs. He spoke with "the staff of G-d in his hand," i.e., with authority and determination.

The lesson for us here is that whenever we are confronted with an "Egyptian king," i.e., someone who seeks to impose upon us elements of a lifestyle that goes against our values and principles - whether through kindness or force - we must recognize the inherent danger in succumbing to such pressure. In the end, this Pharaoh will tell us to drown ourselves (or our children) in material culture. We must therefore respectfully but resolutely insist on living according to the Torah's values. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 11-12) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FIRSTBORN SON

Meshech Chochmah

"Say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says Hashem: Israel is My son, My firstborn.'" (4:22)

A firstborn son is given the distinction of receiving a double share of his father's inheritance since he established his father as a father. Since the Jewish people - by proclaiming the belief in G-d, in His Providence and in His Almighty power - first caused G-d to be acknowledged as the Father of the Universe, it, too, can lay claim to the title and privileges of a "firstborn son."

CHILDREN OF HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Thus says Hashem: Israel is My son, My firstborn." (4:22)

By referring to the Jewish people as His "son," G-d implied two things: First, that He would be angry with anyone who harms them, just as any father would be angry with anyone who harms his child. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5701)

Second, that the love between G-d and His people is as essential as that between a father and a son.

From the second point we learn that no matter how depraved we may become, G-d's love for us always remains intact. And conversely, each of us should feel as close to G-d as a son or daughter feels to his or her parents.

Just as a child's feelings of closeness to his or her parents may sometimes be dormant, so might our feelings of closeness to G-d sometimes seem dormant. But just like a child's feelings of closeness to his or her parents can always be awakened, so can our feelings of closeness to G-d always be awakened. (Tanya, chapter 2; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5689, p. 112) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

HASHEM'S ONLY CHILD

Baal Shem Tov

"Thus says Hashem: Israel is My son, My firstborn." (4:22)

Every Jew is as precious in the eyes of Hashem as an "only child" born to a parent in their old age.

OVERCOMING DOUBTS

Rebbe Nachman

"So they said, 'The G-d of the Hebrews appeared to us.'" (5:3)

The Jews are called Ivrim (עברים, Hebrews) because with their faith they Oveir (עובר, get past) all their doubts and the challenges to their faith. (See Likutey Moharan I, 64:2)

TORAH FOR ALL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The king of Egypt said [to Moshe and Aharon], 'Get back to your own chores.'" (5:4)

Pharaoh realized that every nation needs its elite class devoted to preserving its cultural identity and heritage. He therefore did not object to Moshe and Aharon studying the Torah and even teaching it to the other Jews.

What he did object to was their proposal to upset the natural order by freeing the Jews. Pharaoh believed in nature, and since the Egyptians were more powerful than the Jews and nature decrees that the strong rule the weak, the Jews should be slaves to the Egyptians.

The essence of the Exodus, however, was to demonstrate that the Jewish people are not bound by the laws of nature, and therefore Moshe and Aharon did not accept Pharaoh's reasoning.

Similarly, we should never succumb to accepting Pharaoh's outlook - the notion that the Torah should be fully observed only by a spiritual elite - or even by the masses, but only on special occasions.

On the contrary, we must seek to free everyone from the bonds of material slavery and allow the Torah to permeate all aspects of life. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 29-32) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

EVIL MIND GAMES

Reb Henoah of Aleksander

"[Pharaoh commanded the taskmasters,] 'You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick...'" (5:7)

Why would Pharaoh have forbidden his taskmasters to supply Hebrew slaves with the straw to make their bricks? If he wanted to make the work tougher for them, couldn't he simply have required the Hebrews to produce more bricks?

The point was that Pharaoh's intention was simply to embitter the lives of the Hebrews. Knowing that worry and seemingly insurmountable problems were infinitely more harassing than even the most strenuous physical labor, he felt that the surest way to break the Hebrews' spirit would be not to demand increased production from them but to tax them with the additional worry of how to procure the straw they needed for their work.

HEAVY RETALIATION

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Make the work heavier on the men and make sure they do it. Then they will not pay attention to false words." (5:9)

When the Jews requested a reduction in their workload, Pharaoh responded by increasing their quotas. When the Jews finally left Egypt, Pharaoh chased after them with the intention of returning them to slavery.

Such is the way of the Other Side. Each time the Jew wishes to discontinue his servitude to materialism, the forces of evil attempt to redouble his bondage. But if one persists, he merits to the Exodus, to freedom.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe returned to G-d and said, 'G-d, why have You mistreated this people?'" (5:22)

Deep down, Moshe was not questioning G-d's justice, but was just seeking to understand it. Moshe and the Jewish people had inherited their faith in G-d from the patriarchs and matriarchs. This faith was indeed very strong, but in order to be redeemed from Egypt and receive the Torah, it was not enough for their relationship with G-d to be an inheritance from their ancestors; they had to make it their own. Only when a person internalizes his faith and makes it his own can it permeate his whole being.

Ironically, the way we transform our inherited faith into our own possession is by questioning it - not out of doubt or for the mere sake of questioning, but in order to truly understand it.

Thus, in response to Moshe's desire to understand G-d's ways, G-d told him that the purpose of the exile was to enable the people to reach an even higher level of Divine consciousness than they could by relying solely on their inheritance from the patriarchs. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, p. 51) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FAITHFUL REDEMPTION

Reb Noson of Breslov

"From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he made things worse for this people, and You have not rescued them." (5:23)

The period right before the end of exile and suffering is the hardest time, as we see that Pharaoh deliberately intensified the workload. Pharaoh's main goal was to instill atheism in the Jews, G-d forbid. But G-d called the Jews "My firstborn son" (Shemos 4:22), ascribing to them holy wisdom. Therefore, Yaakov (who represents wisdom) took the birthright from Eisav (who represents atheism) in order to instill faith in his descendants. Strengthening one's faith, even in the hardest times, leads to redemption.

HAFTORAH

(For Sephardim: Yirmiyahu / For Ashkenazim: Yeshayahu)

UNQUESTIONABLE MESSENGER

Malbim

"But Hashem said to me, 'Do not say, I am a child, for to whomever I will send you, you shall go...'" (Yirmiyahu 1:7)

If someone gets up in front of people and speaks in his own name, he must be an acknowledged authority on his subject if he is to be heard. Age plays an important part here. A young person isn't considered as compelling as an older person, and the younger person's words don't carry much weight.

But if that person speaks, not in his own name but as the messenger of a great and powerful king, it will not matter who he is or how old he is. He will be heard because the king whose messenger he is lends authority and importance to his words.

Thus, G-d said to Yirmiyahu, "To whomever I will send you, you shall go as My messenger." Therefore, don't say: "I am a child," for your age is immaterial. What you yourself are is of no concern; what counts now is only Who it is that sends you.

RESPECTABLE CONFIDENCE

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"...don't be frightened by them, lest I cause you to be frightened before them." (Yirmiyahu 1:17)

If you remain strong and steadfast in the presence of someone evil, the person will come to respect you. But if you show fear, if you grovel, the evil person will cease to respect you and will tread upon you with cruelty.

KNOWLEDGABLE COMPASSION

Chiddushei HaRim

"For it is a people of no understanding; therefore, He Who made them will not have compassion upon them..." (Yeshayahu 27:11)

From this pasuk the Sages deduce that "it is forbidden to have compassion upon someone who has no knowledge" (Berachos 33). A man of whom the Torah itself states that others may not have compassion on is all the more to be pitied. But how can we show our compassion if it's forbidden to have compassion on him? By imparting knowledge to him so that we can be allowed to have compassion on him.

RETURNING THE LOST AND DISPERSED

Avnei Ezel

"And it shall come to pass in that day that a great shofar shall be blown; and they shall come - those who were lost in the land of Ashur (Assyria) and all those who were dispersed in the land of Egypt..." (Yeshayahu 27:13)

When Mashiach comes and gathers all the Jews, all those who had been lost and dispersed will return, including those who had been led astray by false, heretical views and ideas as well as those who had been driven into exile because of their lusts and appetites that led them into corruption.

Assyria symbolizes G-dlessness and heresy, for Sancheriv, king of Assyria, worshipped his own strength and wisdom ("By the strength of my hand have I done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent" - Yeshayahu 10:13). In contrast, Egypt symbolizes unbridled appetites and immorality. This pasuk, then, implies that the great Return will include people "lost" on account of their G-dlessness (symbolized by Assyria) as well as people "dispersed" because of their immorality (represented by Egypt).

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