

# United We Stand

Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Gruss Kollel (YU Israel)

January 6, 2024

Parshas Shemos

25th of Tevet 5784

## The Parsha's Path

Mr. Harry Rothenberg visited the Gruss Kollel this week and related the following story about his wife's friend. After she made aliyah, she found a new manicurist. The manicurist told her of all her troubles: she had just been through a nasty divorce, didn't have the best relationship with her kids, felt financially burdened, etc.

The next week, this woman returned to the manicurist and said, "I have a great idea. Why don't you try Shabbat? It'll add such peace in your life. You can light the candles, have a meal with your kids, and then you can play games with them. You'll get to spend such great quality time!"

"Shabbat? I don't know ..."

"Tell you what, next week I'm going to bring a game for you to play with your kids and you'll try it out."

The next week she did indeed bring a game, though it took a few weeks of prodding until the manicurist finally went ahead and tried it.

"How'd it go?"

"It went really nicely, actually," the manicurist admitted.

"Okay, from now on every week I'll bring you another game to play with your kids."

And, so it went. Slowly, the manicurist began to keep Shabbat in full. A few months later, she told this friend, "You didn't just give me Shabbat. You gave me a husband. I have been dating this guy for a while and we were getting pretty serious. The other day he pulled me aside and told me that he could only marry someone who's shomer Shabbat. I told him, 'Well, that's no problem. I'm shomer Shabbat.'"

After she got married, the manicurist moved to the United States, but she had left a twenty-year-old daughter in Israel. She told her, "I'm not putting pressure on you one way or the other, but I need to know if you're going to continue keeping Shabbat."

In Israel, people who are shomer Shabbat get a cheaper rate on their car insurance since they don't drive on Shabbos, but if they do drive then they won't be insured. Thus, she needed to know which car insurance plan to buy for her daughter.

"I want to continue keeping it," her daughter said. As the weeks went by, it was very hard for her

daughter. Her friends did not keep Shabbos, and she felt alone and isolated. Still, she was determined to keep at it.

One day she got a text from a friend. "There's this huge concert happening! Want to come?"

She loved concerts. She texted back,

"When is it?"

When she saw the date, she wrote back in dismay, "I can't go. It's on Shabbat."

"You're shomer Shabbat?" the friend texted back.

She never thought of herself in those terms before, but for the first time in her life, she wrote back, "yes."

"Ashreich (great for you)" he wrote back. That was the last text she ever received from him.

That concert was the Nova Music Festival.

The manicurist called her friend. "You not only gave me Shabbat. You not only gave me a husband. You gave me my daughter's life."

Imagine if Mr. Rothenberg's wife's friend wouldn't have brought up Shabbat, or if she hadn't pushed and taken such an interest in her manicurist. Would we have dared to do the same?

When G-d tells Moshe to speak to the Jews and confront Pharaoh, even after assuring him that he would be listened to, Moshe persistently defers. He pleads,

*"Please, my Lord, I am not a man of words - not since yesterday nor since the day before yesterday, even from the time you spoke to your servant [i.e. now; see Ramban], for I am slow of mouth and slow of tongue."*

G-d said to him, *"Who gave man a mouth, and who makes a man mute or deaf, someone who can see or blind? Is it not I, G-d?"* (4:10-11).

G-d gives each of us a sacred responsibility to take notice of others and show concern for them – both materially and spiritually. We are entrusted with communicating G-d's messages to those around us, whenever the opportunity arises. Unfortunately, most of us usually second-guess ourselves: "I don't know how to do that," "What if the person is unreceptive or takes offense," "Who am I to bring that up or be so pushy?" If we would only remember that G-d is the one giving us this opportunity, and it is G-d who gives us a mouth to speak.

Moshe had plenty of reasons to be nervous. Besides his speech impediment (Rashi; some suggest Moshe wasn't fluent in Egyptian or wasn't great at rhetoric), the last time he had tried speaking up on behalf of a fellow Jew, he was met with biting criticism and had

***In honor of the bris of my new first cousin once removed, born to Ariel and Ayelet Wolicki!***

to flee for his life (2:13-15). Yet that was no excuse for not rising again to speak up. No matter what disadvantages we may feel we have, we must remember that G-d determines our success - we need only try our best.

I recently read *A Committed Life* by Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis, a"h. The book is full of stories where she confronted people and wouldn't let go until they did the right thing or opened up to making positive change in their lives. Often people were nasty and disrespectful, but she wouldn't back down until she made her point and penetrated their hearts. And remarkably, people listened. They didn't cut her off or end the conversation; they admired her persistence and opened up to hearing her message. They saw that rather than overstepping her bounds, her unyieldingness reflected a deep commitment to both what she was teaching and the people she was trying to teach. So, the next time G-d gives us an opportunity to elevate a fellow Jew's life, let's remember the examples of Moshe, the Rebbetzin, and Mr. Rothenberg's wife's friend, move past our own reservations, and confront the awesome power G-d gives us to speak up.

## Deeper Meanings

*Reprinted from 5781*

*And behold, the bush was burning with fire and the bush was not being consumed (3:2).*

This week's Parsha begins the epic story of the Exodus with the Jews' enslavement, the birth and growth of Moshe, and Moshe's first encounter with Pharaoh. One of the most famous scenes is when Moshe encounters the Burning Bush, through which G-d speaks to him and instructs him to take His people out of Egypt. Yet as iconic as this scene is, one thing we might not have thought about is what it's supposed to mean. What's the unique significance of a bush that's burning but not being consumed?

Chizkuni and one explanation offered by Rabbeinu Bachye suggest that the bush is the Jewish people, who are constantly being "burned" - that is, tortured and oppressed - by their enemies. Normally, this should eventually result in their complete demise; in general, when a people is enslaved they quickly lose their identity as a nation and assimilate into the culture they're in. No matter how much oppression the Jewish people endure, however, G-d endows us with a miraculous endurance to survive.

Many historians and scholars have noted with amazement how the Jewish people follow an unparalleled

pattern in history; despite the fact that they've always been fairly small and they've been exiled from their homeland for thousands of years, and they've gone through extraordinary oppressions and endured genocidal attempts, they've survived intact. Normally, as Rav Dovid Miller put it, nations work in a similar way to nature in general; governed by the second law of thermodynamics, which states that energy is constantly being expended never to be reused so that ultimately everything atrophies into meaningless oblivion. Nations, like nature, always ultimately fall apart, especially when subject to adverse conditions that wane their energy faster. The burning bush is the ultimate symbol of how despite the fact that according to nature, the Jewish people should have run out of energy long ago, G-d keeps infusing us with more energy to continue.

Jews have always been the scapegoat of history. No matter where, whenever chaos ensues, antisemitism rises, from Pharaoh until today. The disturbing events in Washington this past week are a tragic reminder of that fact, as evidenced by the presence of people wearing explicitly pro-Nazi attire and other extremist groups known for their antisemitism. As much as it's important to talk about the need for more rigorous and balanced civic education and respectful dialogue to help fix the current situation, we as Jews must also recognize that we're not always in control of the world around us or at the hatred that ends up being directed against us. Like Moshe, sometimes we're able to be proactive and fight for justice and resolution, but like the rest of the nation at the time, we also need to cry out to G-d. No matter what, though, we can move forward with confidence and pride, knowing that no matter how much we burn, G-d will never allow our bush to be consumed.

## Goal of the week

Respectfully and tactfully encourage someone you know to improve in an area of Yiddishkeit.

*This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for Shaindel Temma bas Rochel Zlotta, Masha Sarah bas Teiviah Leah, Bracha bas Shoshanah, Reuven ben Golda, Yitzchok Moshe haKohen ben Miriam, Ephraim Melech ben Teilah, Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka, and all those injured by the war and acts of terror, as well as for the safe return of all the hostages and soldiers. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos.*

***Have A Great Shabbos !!***

To Sponsor, Subscribe, give feedback, or if interested in helping distribute, please contact [unityparsha@gmail.com](mailto:unityparsha@gmail.com)

### OUR MISSION

**To Bring The Third Beis - Hamikdash By Facilitating Jewish Unity Through Torah**