

O H R N E T

SHABBAT PARSHAT SHMOT · 25 TEVET 5761 · JAN. 20, 2001 · VOL. 8 NO. 13

PARSHA INSIGHTS

SOUL GIVING

“She named him ‘Moshe,’ saying, ‘For I drew him from the water.’” (2:10)

I was talking on the phone with an old friend. He’s probably the oldest friend I have. We were English public schoolboys together nearly forty years ago. To say the least, we traveled very different roads. He married twice. The first time to a Jewish girl. They divorced without children. Now, he’s married again. They have one child, a boy. His name is something like Sebastian.

Last Shabbat at *seudah shlishit* (the third Shabbat meal), I was watching my sons sitting at the table (well, jumping all over the table really). My elder son was repeating words of Torah heard from the mouth of his *rebbe*, his teacher. Words that his *rebbe* had heard from *his rebbe*. Words thousands of years old and full of holiness. And I thought of my friend and his son. I remembered our conversation. My friend told me that his son was very bright and ran rings around his (Christian) bible teacher. “Sebastian” had asked his bible teacher, “Who created G-d?” This left the bible teacher in a lather of half-muttered apologetics such as, “You can’t ask such questions...You don’t understand...” My

friend was pleased that his son was showing no signs of incipient Christianity. In his eyes he had bequeathed to him the atheism that he was brought up to believe was true Judaism.

I said to him that I was surprised the bible teacher should have been stumped by such an easy question. “If someone had created god, then he wouldn’t be G-d. By definition, G-d exists beyond creation. He created creation. Nothing can exist before Him or after Him. Time has no dominion over Him because He created time.” For a moment, my friend wasn’t quite sure whether I was preaching Christianity to him.

And here at the Shabbat table, I was looking at my son “*darshening*” his little heart out. And I thought about what it had cost to get to this table. Breaking your teeth on a language that was taught to you so badly as a child that you’d have been better off not learning it at all. Feeling like an imbecile in front of any five year old *cheder* child. Having to reply “*Ich nisht red Yiddish*” when someone mistakes you for an FFB. Feeling that you will never quite fit in — that there will always be edges that will never be rubbed smooth; having to explain to your daughters why their grandmothers don’t wear *sheitels*.

Was it worth it? Of course it

was. How can you compare a Jewish life to any other? And that’s just in this world...

Every *ba’al teshuva* knows what it means to be *moser nefesh*. Literally, to give over your soul. To sacrifice.

I looked out the window at the beautiful twilight of a Jerusalem Shabbat coming to an end. And I thought to myself — we are living in times of *mesirut nefesh*. When an Arab tapes a bomb to his chest and blows himself up on a bus, it’s not so simple that this is an act of mere lunacy. By his death, he has made the ultimate demonstration of *mesirut nefesh* for what he believes. Such sacrifice creates waves beyond this world.

If any Arab leader agreed to cede one square inch of Jerusalem, I doubt he would find himself alive after his afternoon siesta. Many of our political leaders, on the other hand, see Jerusalem as highly negotiable. Important certainly — culturally, historically, even religiously — but ultimately, negotiable. Are we, as a nation, prepared to be *moser nefesh* for Jerusalem?

Judaism does not require a person to volunteer his own death except in one of three situations: If he is being forced to worship an idol, kill someone, or commit an act of gross immorality. However,

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With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shmot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Parsha, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males. Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid. Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mt.

Sinai) Moshe witnesses the burning bush where Hashem commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to *Eretz Yisrael*, the land promised to their ancestors. Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being Hashem's agent, so Hashem enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: Transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker Hashem tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but Hashem assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews leave.

YESHAYA 27:6 - 28:13, 29:22

DESTRUCTIVE SALVATION

After 210 years of Egyptian bondage, G-d finally redeemed us with unparalleled miracles. Surely G-d could have wrought miracles two centuries earlier and saved a lot of trouble.

Both the Egyptian bondage and its subsequent Exodus were promised to Avraham long before they occurred. The slavery and oppression were part of G-d's plan. The Prophet Yeshaya explains that we are not subject to the whim of our oppressors. Rather, our nation's suffering throughout the ages is part of G-d's plan. When the soul of the nation becomes soiled, when we stray from the Torah's

path, G-d allows our oppressors to teach us what a weak little nation we are.

Yeshaya foresees the time when the People of Israel will repent. When we return to the life of Torah G-d will exact justice on our enemies and gather the exiled Jews home to Jerusalem.

THE VIEW FROM WITHIN

"For (they think) that each mitzvah is only there for another mitzvah, one line for another line, another one for another one, pettiness here, pettiness there." (28:10)

With the above — some of Yeshaya's sharpest words ever to the Jewish People — the prophet rebukes those in whose eyes Torah law is mere semantics — one *mitzvah* for another *mitzvah*. Such people view Torah study as mental gymnastics — one line for another, nothing but pettiness.

What flaw underlies these people's skewed outlook?

It would be impossible to appreciate the beauty of the Bayeaux tapestry just by looking at a square inch of it. Likewise, the beauty of the Torah can only be appreciated by seeing the whole picture. The prophet's criticism is that they never studied the Torah. They have viewed only a tiny corner of it from the outside. And still they dare mock it.

When we engage in proper Torah study and plumb its depths, then we are able to see the Torah as one beautiful tapestry.



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every day Jews are being killed for no reason other than that they are Jewish. They are being *moser nefesh*.

“She named him Moshe, saying, ‘For I drew him from the water’.”

Moshe had ten names. *Moshe, Yered, Chaver, Yekutiel, Avigdor, Avi Socho, Avi Zanuach, Tuvia, Shemaya, Halevi.*

And, of all his names, the only one that G-d called him was Moshe, the name given to him by a gentile princess, *Batya*, Pharaoh’s daughter. If G-d Himself used the name “Moshe” it must be that this name defines him more than any other.

The name Moshe comes from the Egyptian name *Monios* meaning “to be drawn,” for Moshe was drawn from the water by *Batya*.

When *Batya* took Moshe out of the river, she was flouting her father’s will. Pharaoh wanted to kill all Jewish baby boys. By saving Moshe she put her life on the line. She was being *moser nefesh* for Moshe.

Because *Batya* risked her life to save Moshe, that quality of self-sacrifice was embedded in Moshe’s soul. It was this quality that was his essence. For this reason G-d called him only by that name.

If we don’t know what we’re prepared to die for, we don’t really know what we’re living for. If our lives are no more than survival, then we have already lost our sense of destiny. It’s time to wake up. It’s time to realize that life is more than standing in line to get our cell-

phone fixed.

Moshe, our teacher, was closer to G-d than any other human being who walked this planet. His essence, his name, was given in self-sacrifice, in *mesirut nefesh*.

“She [*Batya*] saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maidservant and she took it.” (2:5)

The Midrash explains that the word “maidservant” can be translated as “arm.” *Batya* reached out her arm to retrieve the basket in which Moshe was floating. The basket was an impossibly long way from her arm. Nevertheless, *Batya* reached for it. It didn’t cross her mind that her hand could never reach the basket. She just knew what had to be done, and she did it. She didn’t make calculations of success or failure. There was then a paranormal event. Her hand grew until it reached the basket.

This is a time to extend our hands, even if it seems that there is an impossible distance to travel. This is the time to reach out to our brothers and sisters, to become that true reflection of *Shema Yisrael*, to reflect the Oneness of He who is One in this world. This is the time to extend ourselves, to be *moser nefesh* for each other and for the Jewish People.

May G-d reach out His hand to us and spread the protection of His peace over us and over all Israel, and over all mankind.

Sources:

Ibn Ezra, Kotzker Rebbe, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz

I DIDN'T KNOW THAT!

“Remove your shoes from upon your feet” (Shmot 3:5)

Why does the verse say: “Remove your shoes from upon your feet?” Wouldn’t “Remove your shoes” be enough? Certainly Moshe’s shoes were on his feet!

Rather, the word for shoe, *na'al*, can also mean glove (in Biblical Hebrew), as in the glove that Boaz gave when purchasing a field (*Ruth 4:7*). Therefore, the verse needs to specify “from upon your feet.”

• *Da'at Zekeinim M'Ba'alei HaTosefot Submitted by Avraham Yitzchak Elbaz, Jerusalem*

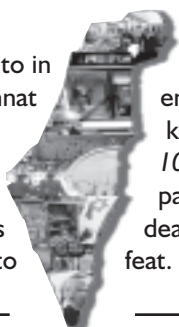
LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael

TIMNAT SERACH

This site in which Yehoshua was buried is referred to in one place as Timnat Serach and in another as Timnat Cheres.

One explanation is that its real name was Timnat Serach but it was also called Timnat Cheres (“Picture of the Sun”) because his tombstone was adorned with a drawing of the sun which he ordered to



stop in its course so that there would be a long enough day to complete his rout of the five Amorite kings who had made war against him (*Yehoshua 10:12-13*). This was done to arouse the emotions of passersby who would comment on the tragedy of death coming to one who had accomplished so great a feat.

BOOMERANG BENEFITS

What effect does the potion which the *sotah* drinks have on her if she was indeed innocent of the suspected adultery? “If she was not defiled and is indeed pure,” says the Torah (*Bamidbar* 5:28), “she will be exonerated and be enriched in childbirth.”

Rabbi Akiva interprets this as a promise that if she was previously barren she will now be blessed with children. In accordance with this view, Rabbi Elazar (*Mesechta Berachot* 31b) explains the vow which Chana made in her prayer to Hashem for relief from her barrenness: “If, You shall see, the plight of Your maid...and will give Your maid human seed, I shall give him to Hashem for all the days of his life.” (*Shmuel* 11:11) If You shall see my plight, said Chana, that will be fine; and if not, I shall make a pretense of being unfaithful to my husband Elkana and be compelled to drink the potion which Your Torah promises will cause me to have children.

This interpretation is challenged by Rabbi Yishmael on the grounds that it would encourage all barren women to feign infidelity, and only the one who maintains a perfect moral standard would be left out. He proposes instead that the Torah promised the absolved *sotah* who previously experienced painful childbirth a comfortable childbirth, boys instead of girls and children of better size and complexion than her earlier ones.

Tosefot raises the same question concerning Rabbi Yishmael’s approach that Rabbi Yishmael raised in regard to Rabbi Akiva’s: Will this not encourage women to feign infidelity in order to gain these advantages in childbirth?

Rabbi Yechezkel Landau, in his *Zion Lanefesh Chaya* (*Tzlach*) commentary on *Mesechta Berachot*, supplies an interesting answer. There is hardly any possibility that a woman will risk her marriage for the sake of a more advantageous childbirth because there is no guarantee that her husband will be interested in going through with the entire *sotah* procedure rather than simply divorce her. The barren woman, on the other hand, anticipates that at the end of ten years of childlessness her husband will in any case be inclined to divorce her, so she has nothing to lose by trying the stratagem proposed by Chana in order to be blessed with children and save her marriage.

“What is wrong with a woman trying in this way to have children?” ask the commentaries. One of the answers given is that it is improper to have Hashem’s Name erased in the *sotah* potion for a purpose other than proving the innocence, just as we find (*Sotah* 7a) that the Sanhedrin attempted to persuade her to confess her guilt in order to avoid such an obliteration.

• *Sotah* 26a

LOVE AND FEAR

Greater is the man who serves Hashem out of love, said Rabbi Shimon ben Alazar, than the one who serves Him out of fear. In regard to the first, Hashem said in the Ten Commandments: “I show kindness to *two thousand* generations to those who love Me and observe my *mitzvot*.” (*Shemot* 20:6) In reference to the latter, Hashem is described as “Keeper of the covenant and kindness...to those who observe His mitzvah for a *thousand* generations.” (*Devarim* 7:9)

Iyov, says Rabbi Meir, served Hashem out of love. He is described as a “G-d fearing man” (*Iyov* 1:1), and so is Avraham at the conclusion of the Akeidah offering of his son Yitzchak when Hashem tells him “Now I know that you are G-d fearing.” (*Bereishet* 22:12) The fear in Avraham’s case was the product of love, as we see that this patriarch is described as “Avraham who loved Me” (*Yeshaya* 41:8); so, too, is Iyov’s fear the product of love.

In order to understand how love can be a more sublime motive than fear and that fear can be the product of love, we must distinguish between fear of retribution and the fear of reverence. One who serves Hashem because of the fear of punishment for not doing so is on a much lower level than one who serves Him out of love. Such love which serves as the energizer for performing *mitzvot* also generates a reverence for the greatness of Hashem, which deters one from doing anything against Hashem’s Will.

There is an interesting observation made by Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh Leib, the great Gerrer Rebbe, in his “Sfat Emet” commentary on Chumash. If Avraham’s service was motivated by love, why did Hashem use the expression of fear in the above mentioned passage praising his passing the test imposed on him in offering his son as a sacrifice? The answer is that when someone like Avraham serves Hashem out of love, every fiber of his being rushes forward with enthusiasm to please Hashem. Since Hashem in reality did not want Yitzchak slaughtered, it was impossible for Avraham to feel the excitement he always felt in doing *mitzvot*. But Hashem had commanded him to bring Yitzchak to the altar as a sacrifice and Avraham, as a faithful servant, asked no questions and ignored his lack of instinctive enthusiasm. This was praised by Hashem as an expression of ultimate reverence, and it could therefore be said of him, “Now I know that you are G-d fearing.”

• *Sotah* 31a

PARSHA Q&A ?

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt?"
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted Hashem's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

PARSHA Q&A!

Answers to this Week's Questions!

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary unless otherwise stated.

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as Hashem promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by Hashem.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah.
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 - It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

KASHA! (KASHA MEANS "QUESTION")

How would you answer this question on the Parsha?

Emilio Kohn from Montevideo, Uruguay <kohn@cs.com.uy> wrote:

"And she called him Moshe, for she said: 'I drew him (m'shitihu) from the water.'" (2:10) "Moshe" was the name Pharaoh's daughter gave to the little baby. But wasn't there a name his parents gave him? I would like to know why, when we read the Torah we always find the name Moshe and not the other one?

Dear Emilio Kohn,

The Midrash relates that Moshe had 10 names. His father called him Chever, his mother called him Yekutiel, his sister Miriam called him Yered, etc. Yet the name given by Pharaoh's

daughter was the one chosen by G-d. The Torah never refers to him by any name other than Moshe. Why?

Pharaoh's daughter saved Moshe's life and adopted him and cared for him as her very own son. Therefore, she merited that her name prevailed. Moshe himself may have used this name out of gratitude to her. This teaches us the great importance of gratitude.

Another reason the Torah calls him Moshe is the significance of the name itself. "Moshe" means that just as he was rescued and drawn from the water, so too he will rescue others from hardship. And that is what he did.

• *Shemot Rabbah 1:26, Vayikrah Rabbah 1:3*

Do you have a KASHA? Write to kasha@ohr.edu with your questions on any Parsha!

JEWISH LITE

Email@Withheld wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I am Jewish, but not Orthodox. I do not follow all 613 commandments all the time, I do not say all the prayers, I don't keep completely kosher, and I occasionally speak improper words and think improper thoughts.

As a first born male, I was redeemed from a kohen by my father. I did have a bris and pidyon haben (redemption of the first-born), and I was bar-mitzvah at 13. I try to attend synagogue regularly for Shabbos on Friday nights, and all Jewish holidays. I fast for most of Yom Kippur and the day of erev Pesach. I do not celebrate Xmas or Easter with my non-Jewish friends, and would not ever consider changing to a different religion.

At synagogue, we do not say all the traditional prayers, and we add a few "new" English prayers. I avoid pork, eating meat with milk, and other such kosher rules, but I don't necessarily eat kosher food. I rarely say a blessing over the food I eat, mainly because it's rarely kosher, and I don't know all the appropriate blessings.

My question is this: Am I doing any good at all? Do abbreviated prayers, selective mitzvot, and acknowledged Jewish identity reap any reward at all? Or by being "Jewish Lite" am I no better than someone who is completely non-observant? I just need to feel that somehow I am contributing the greater good of Judaism by being somewhat observant instead of non-observant. Please let me know if I am making any difference by doing the little I do. Thank you.

Dear Email@Withheld,

You and I have a lot in common. I am also Jewish. I also had a brit, (but not a pidyon haben — redemption of the first born — my parents only did that for my older brother). I was also bar-mitzvah at age 13.

Like you, I also don't think of myself as "Orthodox" (although most people would call me that); rather, I think

of myself as a Jew who tries to observe the Torah which G-d gave us. But, like you, I often succumb to the inexorable onslaught of human failings — laziness, desire, convenience, etc.

You wrote that you occasionally speak improper words. Did you know that more than one-third of the Yom Kippur penitential prayers are devoted to asking G-d to forgive us for sins committed through speech? Regarding proper thoughts, King David prayed: "Create within me a pure heart, G-d."

The bottom line: Everyone fails. Nobody is perfect.

So, I think my answer to your question should be evident by now. Any mitzvot which you perform are certainly praiseworthy and should be encouraged. (Obviously, a mitzvah shouldn't be done at the expense of a transgression. Examples: Friday night after sunset, lighting Shabbat candles is no longer a mitzvah but rather a transgression. The same goes for driving to synagogue. In such a case, the way to express your Jewish identity is to stay home!) Furthermore, your deeds can influence others, without you even knowing it; for example a Jewish friend may stop eating pork because of your example. Or, he may simply tell another person "I have a friend who doesn't eat pork," and that third party, who you may never even meet, may decide to re-think his own level of observance.

There is a danger of being "Jewish Lite," however: It could furnish you with a feeling of being "comfortable" with your observance level. That should never happen to anyone. We all need to continually strive to grow, study and learn more and more about the Torah. Therefore, you should feel happy about the Jewish things that you do, but you shouldn't think of yourself as being at a fixed level of observance. Realize that you can add, if even just one mitzvah a year. Example: Get a tzeddaka (charity) box in your house and put in a coin (even a small one) every day (except Shabbat and Holidays). Perhaps the most important thing for you now is to study Torah on a daily, or at least weekly, basis. If you tell me where you live I can try to suggest some possible study partners for you.

YIDDLE RIDDLE

Last we asked: "I am eating, and at this point I would be required to say two *brachot acharonot* (after-blessings) when I will have finished. I now take a nibble of another food. Now I only need to say one *bracha acharona!* What have I eaten?"

Answer: I have eaten a piece of cake and an apple (or foods with similar *halachot*), making me obligated to say "*al hamichiyah*" and "*borei nefashot.*" I then eat a single grape. Now "*al hamichiyah*" will include "*al ha'eitz*"... which also covers the apple!

• Riddle and answer submitted by Saul Behr in Johannesburg, South Africa <saulb@unihold.co.za>