



Parshas Shmos

For the week ending 25 Teves 5757
3 & 4 January 1997

Overview

With the death of Yosef, the era of the Avos and the Book of *Bereishis* (Genesis) come to an end. The Book of *Shmos* (Exodus) now 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 in Egypt, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate continues to increase, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all baby boys. *Yocheved* gives birth to *Moshe* and places him in a basket in the Nile before anyone can kill him. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts the baby even though she realizes he is probably a Hebrew. *Miriam*, *Moshe's* older sister, offers to find a nursemaid for *Moshe*. She arranges for his mother *Yocheved* to be his nursemaid and help raise him. Years later, *Moshe* witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and *Moshe* kills the Egyptian. When *Moshe* realizes his life is in danger, he flees to Midian where he rescues *Tziporah*, whose father *Yisro* 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*, which Hashem has promised to their ancestors. *Moshe* protests that the Jewish People in Egypt will doubt him being Hashem's agent, and so Hashem helps *Moshe* perform three miraculous transformations to validate him in the eyes of the people: Changing his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprosy one, and water into blood. When *Moshe* declares that he is not a good public speaker Hashem tells him that his brother *Aaron* will be his spokesman. *Aaron* 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 Hebrews leave.

Insights

CASTLES BUILT ON SAND

"The Egyptians started to make the Israelites do labor intended to break their bodies" (1:13)

Henry Ford, the famous American industrialist, was once sitting on the verandah of his mansion by the sea. He saw a fisherman on the beach, lying in the sun, without a care in the world. Next to the fisherman was a bucket in which a few fish were swimming lazily to and fro.

Ford called to the fisherman, who roused himself from his reverie and ambled over to the mansion.

"What are you doing there?" asked Ford.

"Relaxing" replied the fisherman.

"You know" said Ford "If you worked a little harder, you'd catch more fish."

"And then what?" said the fisherman.

"And then maybe you'd have enough money to buy a boat."

"Uh-huh... And then what?" said the fisherman.

"Well, if you had a boat, you'd be able to catch a lot more fish, and if you worked hard, maybe you'd be able to buy a second boat."

"And then what?"

"Well, with two boats you could catch a lot of fish, and with any luck you might be able to make enough to buy a whole fleet of boats."

"And then what?"

"Well — with a whole fleet of boats working for you, you could just take it easy and lie on the beach all day."

"But I'm already doing that!"

People don't work just to make money. A person needs to have a sense of purpose, of pride in his achievements.

The Torah describes the labor that the Jews did in Egypt as *Avodas Parech* — Work which breaks a person. 'Busy-work.'

Nothing diminishes a person so much as seeing his efforts as being futile, as totally without purpose. Thus, Pharaoh instructed that the Jews build *Arei Miskenos* — literally 'pitiful cities.' These cities were built on sand, and no sooner would they be completed, then they would topple and fall. Then they would have to start to build all over again, only to see the entire process repeated again and again.

There once was a prisoner in a Soviet labor camp who was confined to his cell for ten years. Every day was spent turning a large handle that protruded from his cell wall. He was told that the handle turned a flour mill next door to his cell.

At the end of ten years, when he was finally released from his cell, he saw that on the other side of the wall there was absolutely nothing.

This realization was more crushing than all his long years of imprisonment.

The greater the sense of purpose in one's work, the greater is the effort that a person is prepared to invest to achieve it.

A Jew works for an eternal life in *Olam Haba* — the World to Come.

"Six days shall you labor (*ta'avod*) and do all your work (*melacha*), and the seventh day will be a Sabbath to Your Lord." What transforms a person's menial labor (*avoda*) into purposeful creative activity (*melacha*) is Shabbos — the 'taste' of *Olam Haba* in this world.

Adapted from *Outlooks and Insights* — Rabbi Zev Leff

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Written and Compiled by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair
General Editor: Rabbi Moshe Newman

22 Shimon Hatzadik Street, POB 18103, Jerusalem Israel

972-2-581-0315

fax: 972-2-581-2890

ohr@virtual.co.il

38 East 29th Street 8th floor, New York, NY 10016, USA

1-212-213-3100

fax: 1-212-213-8717

RZCorlin@aol.com or estern@Aol.com

613 Clark Avenue West, Thornhill, Ontario L4J 5V3, Canada

1-905-886-5730

fax: 1-905-886-6065

Somayach@MSN.com

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“And Moshe grew, and he went out to his brothers....” (2:11)

There once was a Hollywood cowboy who had come from a very ‘un-cowboyish’ background: He was an assistant in a men’s clothing store in the mid-West. To beef up his image a bit, the studio publicity machine had concocted a new identity for him. They did a quick face-lift on his life story, which now depicted him being discovered in a Wells Fargo telegraph office in a small cowboy town in Arizona. It happened one day that, at the peak of his fame, the Hollywood cowboy came to that small town. As befitting his fame, he was given a ticker-tape parade down Main (or was it Mane?) Street.

As he was riding on the back of his open limousine, his car passed the Wells Fargo office. He leaned across to his press agent — the very same press agent who had re-written his past — and said to him without batting an eyelid:

“You see that Wells Fargo station? That’s where I was discovered...”

One of the dangers of fame is that you can start to believe your own press releases. The Midrash tells us that when Moshe ‘grew’ he grew ‘not like the way of the world.’ The way of the world is that when a person grows and becomes celebrated and famous, he forgets (or makes himself forget) his roots, his background and his brothers. He seems to have a kind of amnesia when it comes to their problems and difficulties. Moshe grew up in the palace of Pharaoh with an Egyptian “gold spoon” in his mouth; nevertheless, he grew up ‘not like way of the world,’ he never forgot the plight of his people. Moshe ‘went out to his brothers.’ He went out to discover their problems and the ways he could rescue them from oppression.

Based on Yalkut HaDrush in Iturei Torah

Haftorah: Yishayahu 27:6-28:13, 29:22-23

Yaakov Avinu had two names: ‘Yaakov’ and ‘Yisrael’. The Jewish People are called by both of the these names.

The name ‘Yaakov’ depicts the experience of the Jewish People in times of degradation and hardship. Yisrael connotes the Jewish People realizing its potential.

The prophet Yishayahu lived in a time of spiritual decay. He begins the Haftorah with the prophecy that the ‘root’ of Yaakov, like all roots, though unseen and trampled on by all, will once again bring forth its luxuriant produce.

THE REVOLUTION THAT WENT WRONG

“To whom shall one teach knowledge, who can be made to understand a message? Those weaned from (mother’s) milk, removed from the breasts!” (28:10)

Since the time of the Industrial Revolution, we have witnessed an ever-accelerating development of science and technology.

“And these are the names of the Children of Israel....” (1:1)

This is the opening line of the book of *Shmos* (Exodus). As it is the first line, it must be hinting something fundamental about the book of *Shmos* itself. For that which comes first always contains the seeds of all that follows.

The book of *Shmos* describes the exile of the Jewish People in Egypt and their miraculous redemption. Hashem never brings a malady upon His people until the cure is already in place. Even before the doom of slavery falls on the Jewish People, the light of redemption is already glowing, hidden away, waiting for its time. We can see this hinted at in the name of the tribes of Israel who went into the slavery of Egypt. **For every name hints to the inevitable redemption.**

The name Reuven comes from the root ‘to see.’ As Hashem said “I have indeed **seen** the affliction of My people” (3:7). Shimon’s name comes from ‘to hear’ — “And G-d heard their moaning...” (2:24)

With the exile comes the redemption. Similarly, we find that *Tisha B’Av* — the day most connected to exile — is the day on which the *Mashiach* is born. And the *Mashiach* will bring with him the ultimate liberation.

As the Holy *Zohar* predicted, from the year 5600, the gates of wisdom were opened. If the Jewish People had been worthy, this tremendous outpouring of knowledge would have found its proper home in the wisdom of Torah and holiness.

Now, since we were not worthy, this diffusion of higher energy has found its way to the realm of superficial wisdom and precipitated the invention of weapons of mass destruction to humanity’s profound loss.

From the day that the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed, ‘prophecy was given to fools and infants.’ Meaning, that when Yisrael dwelled in the Holy land, celestial energy, both spiritual and material, descended to its correct landing place.

However, since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, this spiritual radiance has gone astray — descending on desolate lands and unsuitable people — “fools and infants.”

This is what the prophet means when he asks whether “those weaned from (mother’s) milk” can be “made to understand a message.”

(Adapted from Ahavas Yonason and Rabbi Simcha Bunem M’Pshiske)

INSIGHTS INTO THE ZEMIROS
SUNG AT THE SHABBOS TABLE
THROUGHOUT THE GENERATIONS.



YOM ZEH MECHUBAD - scfn vz ouh
“THIS IS THE MOST PRECIOUS OF DAYS...”

Six days you shall do your work
And the seventh day shall be for your G-d

ששת ימים תעשה מלאכתך
ויום השביעי לא-לוקיך

Shayshes yamim ta'ase m'lachtecha
v'yom hashvi' lalo-hecha

This stanza, based on the words of the Fourth Commandment, suggest a fascinating perspective of Shabbos as an active experience rather than a passive avoidance of activity.

In his commentary on the Torah, Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, author of the “Ohr Hachayim”, explains that the use of the connecting “and” in regard to the seventh day communicates the idea that a Jew works seven days a week — six days in his own activities and on the seventh day in activities of G- dliness. Praying and studying Torah in a manner not available during the other days of the week and even including eating, drinking and sleeping with a special dimension of holiness.