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ON SHMOS - 5769

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Rabbi Zev Leff - Parshas Shemos

Parshas Shemos

Avodas Perach The Importance of Purpose

The Egyptians started to make the Israelites do labor designated to break their bodies (Shemos 113).

In order to keep Bnei Yisrael occupied so that they would not have time to think about Moshe's words heralding their freedom, Pharaoh decreed that henceforth the Jewish slaves would have to collect their own straw while maintaining their previous quota of bricks. Why did Pharaoh not just double their quota? In that way, he would have forced Am Yisrael to work harder and would have benefited from a doubling of production.

The Torah describes our labor in Egypt as avodas parech, literally work that breaks the person. Avodas parech is defined as work that has no purpose and is designed just to keep the slave busy (see Rambam, Hilchos Avadim 116). We are specifically forbidden to work a Jewish slave in this fashion (Vayikra 25 43).

Pharaoh understood that nothing so diminishes a person as seeing no purpose to his activity, no result in which he can take pride. Thus he had Jewish slaves build arei miskenos, which can be translated as pitiful cities. These cities, says the Midrash, were built on the foundations of sand, and toppled over immediately after being built, only to be rebuilt again. Thus, doubling the Israelites workload without doubling production fit perfectly into Pharaoh's plans.

Work can be exhilarating, fulfilling and ennobling, but only when it is melachah-purposeful work, work with a goal. But purposeless work (avodah) only serves to break a person's spirit. A prisoner in a Soviet labor camp was confined to his cell for ten years and forced to turn a handle that protruded from his cell wall. He was told that the handle turned a flour mill on the other side, but upon being liberated, discovered that the handle was

connected to nothing. The realization that he had labored for nothing was more crushing to him than the ten years of imprisonment.

The Talmud (Beitzah 16a) calls the Babylonians foolish for eating their bread with bread. The ba'alei mussar explain that they were caught in a vicious cycle with no purpose other than its own perpetuation. They worked only in order to earn enough bread to have the strength to work another day and earn more bread to sustain themselves for another day. Working to eat so that one can work some more results in a life with no purpose. When the necessity of earning a living is removed from such a life it loses all meaning. That is why so many retirees become depressed, and even suicidal, when they stop working.

Those with Torah are spared this plight, for they realize that everything they do is to secure eternal life in Olam Haba. This recognition gives meaning and value to all of life's pursuits, for the greater the purpose and goal, the more significant the effort. "Six days shall you labor (ta'avod) and do all your melachah, and the seventh day will be a Sabbath to Your Lord ..." (Shemos 20:9-10). What transforms a person's menial labor (avodah) into purposeful, creative activity (melachah) is Shabbos, the taste of Olam Haba in this world.

The word esh has the numerical value of thirty-nine, corresponding to the thirty-nine melachos of Shabbos, the creative activities that went into building and maintaining the Mishkan. Thus the opposite of avodas perach-aimless, purposeless work- is meleches hamishkan, meleches Shabbos-purposeful work that leads to eternal results.

Women many times feel that their work is avodas perach, with no lasting results. The clean clothes are soon soiled again, the house messed up as soon as it is straightened. The result of hours of toil in the kitchen are not framed and saved for perpetuity, but quickly devoured. The key to making these chores ennobling and exhilarating is constantly remembering their ultimate goal the creation of an atmosphere enabling each member of the family to function properly and develop his or her ultimate potential.

Moshe was initially instructed to tell Pharaoh that the Jews wanted to leave Egypt for three days of celebration and sacrifice in the desert. Pharaoh was not told of the real intent of their departure so that he could exercise his free will. Had he been told that the Jews wished to leave forever, he could not possibly have granted their request. Klal Yisrael, on the other hand, had to be told the truth about their departure even though the prospect of having to conquer the Land might fill them with dread, for the ultimate goal of Eretz Yisrael gave meaning to the entire Exodus.

In this light, we can understand the following Midrash. Moshe proclaimed, "I sinned with the word az, and I will rectify [my sin] with the word az. I sinned by saying 'From when (me'az) I approached Pharaoh to speak in Your name, things have gotten worse for the Jewish people' (Shemos 5 23). And I will rectify [my sin] with the word az-'Then (az) Moshe will sing the song at the Red Sea' (Shemos 151)."

Moshe sinned by isolating a moment - Pharaoh's decree of additional labor - and not placing it in the perspective of the ultimate goal. Had Moshe seen the decree as one more stage towards the eventual Redemption, he would have viewed it differently. Moshe rectified his error when he sang at the splitting of the Sea not only for the moment of present salvation, but for all the future redemptions until the resurrection of the dead. Thus he sang in the future tense.

The Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (1:3) says that one should not serve Hashem in order to receive reward. Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 10:1) explains the reward referred to includes even the reward of Olam Haba for fulfilling the mitzvos. Rather one should serve Hashem out of pure love and devotion, with no ulterior motive at all. Yet the Torah is full of verses that exhort us to observe its commandments "in order that you live" or "in order that your days be multiplied," (see e.g., Shemos 20:12, Devarim 4:1, 4:40, et. al.)- which are understood as referring to eternal life.

The resolution of this seeming contradiction is that the knowledge that the mitzvos result in eternal life gives added dimension and significance to the

performance of the mitzvah itself-apart from any concern with the reward of Olam Haba - and thereby engenders greater love for the commandments. In this context, does not mean "in order that," referring to a consequence of the performance of the mitzvos, but rather "because" in the sense of revealing the true significance of the mitzvos. Recognition of that significance enhances the love of the Creator, Who bestowed His creation with eternal meaning.

To truly appreciate the significance of our mundane pursuits and the mitzvos that constitute our service of Hashem, we must be constantly aware of our ultimate goal of bringing the world to perfection by fulfilling God's will.

The Measure of a Gadol

The child grew up ... It happened in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren (Shemos 2 10-11). Ramban, commenting on the apparently repetitive mention of Moshe's growing up, explains that the first phrase refers to Moshe's attainment of physical maturity. The second phrase refers to Moshe's growth in intellectual and spiritual maturity, to his becoming "a man of understanding."

The Torah proceeds to specify the sign of Moshe's spiritual maturity the fact that he went out to his brothers and saw their labors. Rashi comments on this phrase that Moshe contemplated their plight and "applied his eyes and heart to suffer with them."

The mark of a gadol, a person who possesses greatness and maturity, is defined by the Torah in terms of his ability to be concerned with others. The Ribbono Shel Olam is called HaGadol, the Great, and Chazal explain this appellation to refer to Hashem's trait of goodness and kindness. Therein lies His gadlus. The concern that envelops and permeates all existence is the mark of His unlimited greatness. Hence He is HaGadol.

We are exhorted to walk in Hashem's ways and emulate His attributes "As He is called merciful, so, too, should you be merciful." Thus, if Hashem is called HaGadol, we too must strive to emulate this gadlus. Just as He is concerned with all Creation, so must we strive to emulate that all-encompassing concern.

Rabbi Shimon Shkop, zt"l, in his preface to Shaarei Yoshor, addresses the following paradox. On the one hand, man was created with a natural concern for himself and his own personal needs. "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is predicated on self-love and self-concern. And yet, man is exhorted to be concerned with others. Reb Shimon explains that the key to resolving these seemingly conflicting concerns lies in the definition of self.

Everyone possesses their "ani"-the essence of their being. As the Mishnah clearly states in Pirkei Avos (114), "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" However, the definition of this selfhood can be expanded beyond the parameters of one's physical person.

Many people feel that their spouses are part and parcel of themselves-"His wife is like his own body," say Chazal. Hence one's concern for a spouse is included in the natural concern for self. Others extend their self to include their families, still others their neighbors. The more one perfects himself, the more his concept of self encompasses. The truly great person feels all Klal Yisrael, indeed the entire world, as part of his self.

And so, the Mishnah in Avos continues, when my ani is limited to my individual self alone, what is the value of this ani?"

A baby enters this world with a clenched fist. After 120 years, part of the preparation for burial includes the opening of the deceased's hands. A person comes into this world concerned only with his own needs and desires. His fist is clenched tight. He is closed unto himself. As he matures, he slowly opens that fist to reach out to extend his self to others, to embrace an entire world in his concern. He must exit this world with an open hand.

This outreach of the self is not mere sympathy, but rather a deep empathy and total identification. Hence, it requires applying one's eyes and heart. It

necessitates observing, assessing and understanding the circumstances and needs of others.

But that is not sufficient, for once one has assessed his neighbor's situation with his eyes, he must open his heart to what he sees-to actually experience emotionally the hurt and pain, the fears and apprehensions, the joys and satisfaction of one's extended self.

The true gadol is only indirectly measured by how many blatt Gemara he has mastered and the profundity of his pilpul. Rabbi Aharon Kotler, zt"l, explains that Torah learning is the ultimate chesed. When we say, "Talmud Torah is equal to them all," it is other acts of chesed to which we are referring. For all other kindnesses are specific and limited, but Torah study is the source of existence. If not for constant Torah study the world would cease to exist. How profound and all-encompassing is the concern and kindness of the one who immerses himself in the study of Torah, thereby preserving the entire universe.

The Torah giant is familiar with the entire world. For Torah is the blueprint of the world and only through comprehensive and penetrating knowledge of this blueprint can one gain the eyes to see the world as it really is, to truly be cognizant of the needs and problems of mankind.

The study of Torah and the total immersion in God's will unites one with his Creator and imbues him with an open heart, with emotional understanding, compassion, and empathy. Only the Torah giant can fully possess the sensitivity that emanates from God's Torah, which is referred to as Rachmana-the Merciful.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, rav of Vilna and gadol hador of the previous generation, kept a written record of all the many and varied charities of Vilna which he supervised. In it were the records of free loans, monies for poor brides, caring for the sick, the guesthouses for poor travelers, and general tzedakah accounts. It was a massive, voluminous record. When a fire destroyed this book, Reb Chaim Ozer reproduced it from memory.

This story is not important for what it tells us about Reb Chaim Ozer's phenomenal memory, but for what we learn of the importance that he attached to these records.

Our respect for our gedolim is enhanced when we realize that their gadlus in Torah is an emulation of the gadlus of Hashem, which leads them to concern for the entire world.

Appreciating this gadlus should inspire us to strive to extend our concern to include all of our fellow Jews. When we achieve this goal Hashem will reciprocate as He did in Egypt. When Moshe applied his eyes and ears to his fellow Jews, Hashem responded in kind. As the Torah tells us, "And G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. G-d saw the Children of Israel; and G-d knew" (Shemos 2:24-25). And Rashi comments "Hashem put His heart to suffer with them and did not turn His eyes from them."

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From **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> date
Thu, Jan 15, 2009

Rabbi Frand on Parshas Shmos

Being Made Matriarchs Was The Reward For Acting As Mothers

In this week's parsha, at the beginning of Sefer Shmos, Pharaoh issues his cruel order to the Hebrew midwives that they must kill all male Hebrew children. The Torah tells us that the names of the midwives were Shifrah and Puah. Rashi identifies Shifrah as Yocheved and Puah as Miriam, the mother and sister respectively of Moshe Rabbeinu. The names Shifrah and Puah were given because of their treatment of the newborn children. Shifrah comes from the root shin-pey-reish, meaning to improve the child (through cuddling and massaging in a way to correct any deformity that occurred as a result of the birthing process). Puah refers to the way Miriam spoke to the infants, calming them down and stopping their crying.

In an act of tremendous courage, the midwives did not listen to Pharaoh's edict. At his whim, he could have put them both to death for disobedience. When confronted, they gave the excuse that Jewish women did not really need midwives and by the time the midwives arrived at the women's homes, the babies were already born.

The Torah states: "And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses." [Shmos 1:21]. Rashi interprets this as referring to houses of Kehuna, Leviya, and Malchus [Priests, Levites and monarchy].

The question that must be asked is why the Torah seems to hide the identities of these women, by calling them Shifrah and Puah. We are talking about the daughter and granddaughter of Levi. This is the granddaughter and great-granddaughter of Yaakov Avinu. Why be so oblique? Why not call them by their real names – Yocheved and Miriam?

I saw an interesting observation in the sefer Tiferes Torah by Rav Shimshon Pinkus, zt"l. Rav Pinkus invites us to picture the following scene: (May we never personally have to witness it!) We have before us a child who is seriously sick. We rush him to the hospital at night. The doctors and nurses take one look at him and say the baby is in extreme danger. They quickly remove his clothes and start an IV. They immediately rush the child to treatment and feverishly try to save his life.

In such a situation, do the doctors and nurses bother to start cooing at the baby and making smiling faces at him so he will be happy? They do not waste a minute with niceties and small talk. Emergency room personnel have no time to worry about soothing the child and cooing at him. A life is at stake. There is no time for pleasantries!

What does the mother do through all of this? When the mothers sees those doctors working on the baby in the emergency room, she sits there with the child and gently soothes the baby assuring him everything will be alright, that the poking and prodding will soon be over. She coos at the baby, she pets the baby, she whispers to the baby, she sings to the baby. Why? Because that is what a mother does.

The doctors are saving the baby's life. They are doing what they must do. But they are not mamas. Mamas are mothers. Mothers realize that babies need to be soothed and comforted.

Yocheved and Miriam were righteous women who risked their lives. But what really impressed the Almighty was the fact that while risking their lives, they simultaneously demonstrated they were still mamas. They treated each child as if it were their own baby. When a baby needed to be cuddled and soothed, Miriam -- sister of Moshe and daughter of Amram -- sang sweet little lullabies to the baby. And Yocheved -- the daughter of Levi and wife of Amram -- despite everything that was going on, still worried that the shape of the baby's head should be just right.

That is why the just reward for their heroism is that G-d made them "houses". He made them matriarchs. This was midah k'neged midah [measure for measure] because above everything else, they were mothers. The reward for being a mother is to have grandchildren and great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren. When motherhood could have perhaps been overlooked, they nevertheless remained mothers and so G-d saw to it that they would eternally be remembered as matriarchs of the nation.

The wife of Rav Shlomo Heiman, zt"l, was involved in charity and kindness all her life. She specialized in marrying off orphans. She was once going to a wedding of one of these orphan girls for whom she had arranged the entire wedding. Her husband asked her if she was taking flowers for the bride to the wedding. She was surprised at the question, because she felt it was not right to buy flowers with charity money that she raised for hachnasas kallah. However, her husband insisted that she buy flowers because this orphan was also like a daughter. He reminded his wife that she was not only a charity collector, but she was also a mother for this bride. Just like a mother would not contemplate her own daughter walking down the aisle to her Chuppah without carrying a bouquet of flowers, so too here. "You are not just a Gabbai Tzedakah, you are a mamma for this girl. A mama worries about the flowers."

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #620 – Kosher Cheese: What Is It? Good Shabbos!

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from **Rabbi Aryeh Striks** <striks@vths.org> reply-to striks@vths.org to internetparshasheet@gmail.com date Thu, Jan 15, 2009 at 10:45 PM subject Mussar HaTorah - Parashas Shmos Valley Torah High School Mussar HaTorah

Torah insights into human nature from the weekly parasha. **Based on the talks of Rabbi A. Henach Leibowitz zt"l** (Rosh HaYeshiva of Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim - RSA) and dedicated in his memory. This week's Mussar HaTorah - a weekly parasha newsletter - can be downloaded at this link: "And he saw that there was no man ..." (Shmos 2:12) Moshe witnessed an Egyptian beating a fellow Jew. Before Moshe took action to stop this Egyptian from possibly killing the Jew, the pasuk relates, Moshe looked around and saw that there "was no man." The Midrash Rabbah (Shmos 1:29), quoting R. Yehudah, explains this to mean that there was no one else present possessing zeal to rise up and kill the Egyptian. The Mahrzu points out that, according to this explanation, other Jews were indeed present and witnessing the assault, yet they were not willing to take the necessary action. Why does the Torah take pains to describe the passivity of the bystanders, and that Moshe noticed it? What difference does it make that the onlookers did nothing? The simplest explanation would be that Moshe only stepped forward to kill the Egyptian because there was no one else willing to do so. Indeed, the Mahrzu quotes the mishna in Pirkei Avos (2:5), "In a place where there are no men, try to be a man," applies here in the sense that Moshe acted ("tried to be a man") only because no one else was "a man." However, this explanation is vulnerable to a serious question: Wouldn't Moshe have rushed to fulfill this great mitzvah of saving a fellow Jew even if other people were available? The Gemara teaches us that one should always try to be the first one to do a mitzvah (Bava Kama 38b). Surely Moshe, who possessed a highly developed middah of z' rizus -- zeal, would not have hesitated to grab this opportunity to perform the incredible mitzvah of saving a Jewish life; how is it conceivable that Moshe would have passed it up? We must conclude that Moshe really would have seized the chance to do this mitzvah even if there were others that were ready and able to kill the Egyptian. The

lack of response by other Jews did not determine whether Moshe would react, but rather how he would react. Moshe would not have acted with the same intensity had he known that other people were available. The Midrash is explaining that Moshe surveyed the scene and saw no one else ready to act. This knowledge did not make him hesitant, feeling alone and unsure. Instead, seeing this state of affairs filled him with courage and strength. He focused on the fact that he was the only one willing to save his Jewish brother. This knowledge only caused Moshe to increase his zealous fervor. How often do we find ourselves in situations that call for action, that require us to stand up and do the right thing, and we look around to see if anyone else is thinking the same way? If others don't seem motivated to act, it sometimes makes us afraid to play the "righteous" or "religious" person, and we back off. Even if we have the backbone to step forward and take the initiative, it's with reluctance and hesitation. "After all," we think to ourselves, "no one else is doing it..." so we feel embarrassed and insecure. From Moshe's example we learn that not only shouldn't we hesitate to do what's right, despite the ambivalence or apathy of the spectators, but to the contrary – we should increase our zeal and energy level, magnify our courage and our fortitude. Precisely because they are uncaring and unmotivated, we should be galvanized to act with greater decisiveness and more strength, because "there is no one else but me to do the will of Hashem!" May we merit to be Hashem's messengers as we carry out His will with zeal, with confidence and with simcha

From <debra@haretzion.org.il> to yhe-halak@vbm-torah.org date
Wed, Jan 14, 2009 at 4:37 AM subject [Yhe-halak] VBM-
HALAK69 -12:

Praying Towards Jerusalem

by **Rav Yaakov Medan** Translated and adapted by Rav Eliezer Kwass
May HaKadosh Barukh Hu have mercy upon His people and upon His land.

Shiur #12: Praying Towards Jerusalem

A curious problem arose in the RBM (= the Real Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion in Alon Shevut - home of the VBM; see a picture on our web page): the beit midrash does not face directly towards Jerusalem, but, instead, due north. Though under normal circumstances every Jew in the world prays towards Jerusalem, should an exception be made when that will mean not facing the aron kodesh during prayer? Rav Medan, in a lecture given to the students of Yeshivat Har Etzion on Shabbat parashat Lekh Lekha 5750, analyzed the issue and arrived at practical conclusions. This problem is not unique to Yeshivat Har Etzion; often conditions necessitate building a synagogue or beit midrash (for instance, the Yeshiva University main beit midrash in the RIETS building) whose front does not face Jerusalem. The lecture deals specifically with the beit midrash at Har Etzion, but the conclusion of Rav Medan is relevant to similar situations. **INTRODUCTION** The beit midrash faces due north precisely. Many of those praying in the beit midrash are faced with a choice between facing towards Jerusalem and facing the aron kodesh. This problem arises in many synagogues which for one reason or another were not built facing Jerusalem, and often in a markedly different direction. An especially serious problem arises at the southern portion of the Western Wall. If one prays while standing perpendicular to the Wall it often means deviating up to 70 degrees from the direction of the Holy of Holies! To properly understand this issue, three questions must be posed: A. How important is praying towards Jerusalem and the Temple? B. How essential is precision in this matter? C. Is there anything wrong with not facing the aron kodesh in a synagogue? **THE IDEAL PRAYER DIRECTION** According to the gemara in Berakhot (30b), the source for praying towards Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple Mount is the verse (from Shelomo's prayer at the dedication of the Beit Ha-mikdash), "They should pray to G-d towards Your chosen city." No dissenting

opinions are quoted, and the gemara concludes with the following derasha: "Like the Tower of David built up beautifully ('le-talpiot') - [The Temple Mount is] the hill ('tel') that all mouths ('piyot') are directed towards."

In contrast, the gemara in Bava Batra (25) offers four directions in which to pray, none of them towards the Temple! Of these four options, there is only one veiled reference to prayer towards Jerusalem and the Temple. The four options listed there are: A. ANY direction (except, perhaps, east because of the heretics) is legitimate because the Shekhina (Divine Presence) is everywhere - Rabbi Yishma'el, R. Sheshet and others. B. Towards the WEST, because the Shekhina is in the west (this is the direction those within the Temple pray towards) - R. Akiva, R. Yehoshua son of Levi and others. C. Towards the NORTH, if one wants to become wealthy - R. Yitzchak. D. Towards the SOUTH, if one wants to become wise - R. Yitzchak (according to R. Yehoshua son of Levi, if one wants to become wealthy). Regarding the last two opinions, Rashi argues that a person should direct himself toward Jerusalem, but only his face should point towards the south or north. However, the Mahari Abuhav (quoted by the Beit Yosef in OC 94) and the Rama, say the opposite. They maintain that the body should point toward the north or south and only the face should look toward Jerusalem. Most Rishonim view these two passages, in Berakhot and in Bava Batra, as representing opposing positions. However, the Tosafot and the Rosh claim that R. Chanina, who mentions the direction of the Land of Israel at the end of the passage in Bava Batra, takes the position of the gemara in Berakhot. Most of the poskim, including the Rambam, rule according to the passage in Berakhot, that one should face the Temple Mount during the silent prayer. However, the Smag and the Mahari Abuhav, rule like R. Yitzchak in Bava Batra, that one can choose to pray towards the north or south, depending on if he is interested in wealth or wisdom. As opposed to Rashi, they maintain that one's body should be directed north or south, and only one's face should point to Jerusalem. The Shulchan Arukh and the Rama adopt the Mahari Abuhav's position. It is possible, according to their ruling, that in the same synagogue people might be pointed in three different directions during the silent prayer. One group would face Jerusalem and the Temple, another would face south, and still a third would be praying towards the north! This was not seen as problematic, even during public prayer (the Mishna Berura implies that the three options were also open to public prayer), when we are usually cautious to maintain uniformity, because of the prohibition "lo titgodedu" - do not break up into different groups ("lo ta'asu agudot agudot"). This position is difficult to apply and has not been practically adopted. In fact, a number of the Acharonim (see the Kaf Ha-chayim OC 94:6) attempt to limit the Shulchan Arukh's ruling to where extenuating circumstances prevent one from facing the direction of Israel, even though, ideally, one should only face towards Israel and Jerusalem.

Even the Mishna Berura (OC 94:12) records that the custom in Eastern Europe was not to adopt the Shulchan Arukh and Rama's position. Most people followed Rashi's opinion and only inclined their heads in prayer towards the north or south, while facing their bodies towards Jerusalem. This is based on maintaining uniformity in the synagogue ("lo titgodedu"). The approach (1. above) that the Shekhina is everywhere and therefore one can face any direction, is rejected by the poskim. The Taz does, however, rely on it when he rules that if one began praying facing the west he should not move his feet in order to face Jerusalem. The Ma'amar Mordekhai argues that one should move his feet to the proper direction. **PRECISELY FACING ISRAEL, JERUSALEM AND THE TEMPLE MOUNT** We have shown that the bulk of the poskim rule that one should face Jerusalem during prayer. What is defined as "facing Jerusalem?" How precisely does one have to point himself in that direction? Is it sufficient not to clearly turn towards a different direction, or is it essential to face a particular direction? Three sources imply that precision is not so important: A. Our version of Berakhot 30 reads, "One should direct one's HEART towards Jerusalem." It seems to speak primarily about an INNER direction (the Arukh Ha-

shulchan notes this). B. The gemara implies that even with regards to one's physical position, precision is not so crucial. It sounds as if one standing outside of Israel can merely point towards ISRAEL, but does not need to direct himself to Jerusalem or the Temple. Likewise, throughout Israel it is sufficient to face Jerusalem, and not necessarily the Temple Mount (the Arukh Ha-shulchan also points this out). C. Rabbi Chanina (Bava Batra 25) tells Rav Ashi that in order to pray towards Israel, Babylonian Jews should face south during prayer. Even though Israel is southwest of Bavel, Rabbi Chanina does not require people to face southwest during prayer (the people of Israel are even called "the westerners" in the Babylonian Talmud). Apparently, there is no need to perfectly align oneself toward Israel, getting the rough general direction is sufficient (the Ma'adanei Yom Tov's second explanation of the Rosh's opinion)..

Likewise the Rosh (and following him the Tur and the Rama) writes that the prevalent custom among European Jewry was to face EAST during prayer, even though Israel is SOUTH of both Germany (the Rosh's original home), and Poland (the Rama's home). Despite these sources, most of the poskim held that one should strive for precision as much as possible:

A. The Tosafot in Berakhot reject the version of the gemara that reads, "direct one's HEART," because it refers to directing one's body also. B. Rabbeinu Yona explicitly writes that one standing outside Israel should not only face Israel, but also Jerusalem and the Temple Mount. Likewise, outside of Jerusalem people should also pray towards the Temple. In fact, anywhere in the world people should face the kaporet above the Holy Ark in the Holy of Holies. Rabbeinu Yona clearly calls for precision. C. The Ma'adanei Yom Tov explains that R. Chanina was, in fact, telling R. Ashi that the Babylonian Jews should ALSO face the south when they pray, and NOT ONLY the west: R. Chanina was actually trying to fine tune their direction so they would pray towards the southwest, towards Jerusalem, and not only the west, as they previously had been. Both the Chatam Sofer (Responsum 19) and the Yad Eliyahu (section 1) explain the gemara this way. The Levush (section 94) writes extensively to prove that in Lublin, Poland, where he lived it is necessary to pray towards the south east, not merely to the east. He calculates the exact direction and most of the Acharonim (especially the Yad Eliyahu) agree with him. Even the Mishna Berura agrees with the Levush's opinion and holds that, ideally, one should face precisely towards Jerusalem. As we mentioned earlier, the Arukh Ha-shulchan and it should be pointed out the Ma'adanei Yom Tov (in his second explanation as opposed to C. above - his first explanation) rule leniently like the Rosh and Rama (against the Levush). There are two practical ramifications of how precise one must be in praying towards Jerusalem:

1. If one faces the wrong direction and realizes this in the middle of prayer, is it necessary to change directions mid-prayer? The Taz and Ma'amar Mordekhai, as mentioned above, argue about whether to shift direction once one realizes the mistake. Even the Ma'amar Mordekhai, who usually requires redirecting oneself, is of the opinion that it is not necessary to switch directions in order to face Jerusalem more precisely. If a Jew in Europe accidentally faced towards the east he would not have to move while praying the amida to face the southeast.
2. If the whole congregation mistakenly prayed in the wrong direction, (for example: east and not southeast) can an individual pray exactly towards Jerusalem or is this considered arrogant or liable to provoke an argument? This is discussed in the Yad Eliyahu (at length) and in the Mishna Berura.

FACING THE ARK VS. FACING JERUSALEM I have not found any halakhic source mandating prayer TOWARDS the aron kodesh, but a group of Acharonim (the Ma'adanei Yom Tov, Peri Megadim, Arukh Ha-shulchan, and Mishna Berura) write that one should not pray with ONE'S BACK TOWARDS THE ARON. This prohibition takes precedence over the obligation to pray towards Jerusalem. In other words, it is better not to pray towards Jerusalem if that results in one's back facing the aron kodesh. The Magen Avraham and Yad Eliyahu do not mention this consideration, implying that one should face Israel and Jerusalem at all costs. The poskim who do take the position of the aron into

account base this prohibition on two different verses: "their backs were to the House of God" (Yechezkel 8:16) and "they turned their backs towards Me" (Yirmiyahu 32:33). What is considered praying with one's back to the aron kodesh? In most of the synagogues and batei midrash whose arks are not facing Jerusalem, if one faced Jerusalem precisely his back would still not totally face the aron. What is the cutoff line? The Arukh Ha-shulchan (OC 94:5) implies that the halakha is very stringent about praying with one's back to the aron: "Likewise all those that stand to the north of the aron kodesh [mistakenly facing due east and not southeast] can face the east and incline towards the south. However, those standing on the southern side of the aron should not incline towards the south because then their back will be facing the aron kodesh. They should therefore face directly to the east." Even though those standing to the south of the aron do not have their backs COMPLETELY facing the aron, he still forbids turning more toward Jerusalem. This is how Harav Amital shlita ruled for us in our beit midrash. All those standing southeast of the aron, including the shaliach tzibbur, should not incline towards the east but should remain facing due north, the direction of the aron. [This does not mean that they should pray in the direction that their seats face, northwest(!), but rather due north.] I have two doubts about the Arukh Ha-shulchan's position:

A. In 94:13 he writes that if the aron is on the northern or southern side of the synagogue one who is praying individually (not with a minyan) can pray towards the eastern wall. This seems to allow some leeway, even veering 90 degrees from the direction of the aron. B. Even if we accept that the Arukh Ha-shulchan rules stringently in this case, perhaps he was building on his own opinion that does not demand precision with regards to directing oneself towards Jerusalem. Perhaps, the majority of poskim who rule stringently about facing Jerusalem and the Temple Mount, would allow a person to pray only partially facing the aron. Indeed, the Peri Megadim in the Mishbetzot Zahav seems to be less concerned about veering from the direction of the aron. Only the rav, standing right next to and south of the aron kodesh, would have his back to the aron if he inclined his body towards Jerusalem. With regards to the rest of the congregation, he, as well as the Divrei Chamudot on the Rosh, does not seem to be concerned with people only partially facing the aron. The Mishna Berura, based on the Peri Megadim and Divrei Chamudot, seems to agree, for he writes: "If he finds himself in a place where the wall faces the east he should incline towards the southeast. If, though, he finds himself praying south of the aron, he should not incline himself thus, so as not to appear to have one's back to the aron." My general impression is that he is also only concerned about having one's back to the aron for one who stands directly south of the aron. Even though his formulation does not tightly prevent any other interpretation, his source in the Peri Megadim is certainly clear about this point. Based on this, and on the Magen Avraham and the Yad Eliyahu, it would seem that as long as the line extending forward from between a person's shoulders reaches the front of the aron, it is legitimate to face precisely towards Jerusalem. This presentation is, of course, only a theoretical suggestion, for the Rosh Yeshiva has already ruled based on the straightforward reading of the Arukh Ha-shulchan. We would like to point out, though, that even according to the Arukh Ha-shulchan when one BOWS he should try to face Jerusalem. One's heart should definitely be directed to Jerusalem and the Temple, as Daniel did in his prayer. Thereby, we will fulfill "They will pray to You towards the city which You chose," and Hashem will likewise respond - "You will hear from Your dwelling place on high." [Adapted from Daf Keshet #240, Tammuz 5750, vol. 3, pp. 90-94.]

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum - Parshas Shemos
Reply
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<shemalist@shemaisrael.com> to Peninim

<peninim@shemayisrael.com> date Thu, Jan 15, 2009 at 4:17 AM
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PARSHAS SHEMOS But the midwives feared G-d...and they caused the boys to live. (1:17) Imagine that you have told someone about a certain individual who risks his life daily to save the lives of tens of thousands of children, and then the person asks you: Does he have yiraas Shomayim, fear of Hashem? You would probably look at the questioner incredulously and respond, "What difference does it make? He is saving lives! What more are you concerned with?" Horav Eliyahu Lopian, zl, notes that while this may be an ordinary human perspective, the Torah does not seem to concur. The Torah writes that "the midwives feared G-d." Furthermore, later on in pasuk 21, the Torah writes, "And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses." Apparently, the only reason they merited the "houses"-- which is defined by Chazal as a reference to the houses of Kehunah, Priesthood, Leviyah, Leviites, and Malchus, Monarchy-- was their yiraas Shomayim., not their self-sacrifice to save the children.

Clearly, this teaches us that saving lives, even at the risk to one's own life, must be guided by fear of Heaven. We see this in our own time when organizations involved in saving lives throughout the world make decisions regarding who should live and who should die based upon political pressure or vested interests. Did we not confront a similar situation during the Holocaust when the efforts of rabbanim from the Vaad Hatzalah, relief and rescue committee, were hampered by secularists who were afraid that the measures the Vaad employed were not "dignified" or did not conform with government standards? Who cares? Lives are in danger! The secularists saved lives - their way. They saved young, strong men who could go to Palestine and build the Land. The older, weaker generation were just not worth the effort. They were guided by their personal and political agendas - not by yiraas Shomayim. Any endeavor which one performs without the motivation of, and guidance by, yiraas Shomayim lacks in its virtue and merit.

The boy grew up and she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh. And he was a son to her. She called him Moshe. (2:10)

Moshe Rabbeinu actually was given ten names. The Midrash says that the name that became his for posterity was the one given to him by Bisayah, the daughter of Pharaoh. Chazal cite a number of reasons for this. They suggest that we derive from here the extent of the reward received by those who are gomel chesed, perform deeds of lovingkindness. Pharaoh's daughter was a good person - a kind, benevolent woman, who saved a Jewish infant at a time in which her own father had decreed that every Jewish child should be drowned. Hashem rewarded her for her kind heart by determining that the name she gave the infant would remain his permanent name. Imagine, he was the first Moshe from whom millions throughout Jewish history have received his name - given to him by Pharaoh's daughter. It was not a Biblical name. It was a contrived name which commemorated an experience. She wanted to remember his roots and her participation in saving him. She did not want to forget that she had saved a Jewish child. She was proud of her deed.

People perform chesed, acts of lovingkindness, all of the time. Does this mean that each one merits such a reward? Perhaps. Does Bisayah's act constitute such heroism, such altruism, such benevolence that the name she gave has been perpetuated throughout Klal Yisrael? Perhaps, but there is a deeper idea here expressed by the phrase, vayehi lah l'ben, "and he was a son to her." What is the meaning of these words? Did she adopt Moshe?

Horav Yehoshua Leib Diskin, zl, was one of the greatest Torah giants. He was rav in Brisk-- and later in Yerushalayim-- over a century ago. At the time, due to disease, many young children were orphaned. The gentiles and secularists-- who were Jewish by birth only-- treated these young unfortunates as human refuse, throwing them out into the streets, forcing

them to fend for themselves. One such foundling was taken in by the Diskins, who raised and educated him. He was joined by others. As the adopted "family" grew, Rav Yehoshua Leib established what was to become the famous Diskin orphanage.

The Maharil Diskin, as he was reverently called, told his students about one of the young orphans who would burst into bitter weeping every time Rebbetzin Diskin shampooed his hair. This went on constantly. Every time she shampooed his hair when she bathed him, he would cry heartrendingly like only a young orphan can. Rav Yehoshua Leib asked him, "Why do you cry so bitterly? Is it painful?"

"Yes, it hurts," the young boy replied, "but it is not physical pain. When the Rebbetzin washes my hair, I am reminded of when my mother used to wash my hair. After my mother finished washing my hair, she would kiss me. I miss my mother's kiss!" From then on, the Rebbetzin always gave the young boy a motherly kiss of love.

That, explained Rav Yehoshua Leib, is the meaning of "and he was a son to her." Pharaoh's daughter was able to make Moshe feel like a son. This is the height of chesed. He was not just some other "kid" that was brought home for dinner. He was Bisayah's son! When chesed extends to this point, it incurs an incredible reward.

The boy grew up and she brought him to the daughter of Pharaoh...It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren. (2:10, 11)

The Midrash Tanchuma notes the redundancy of the word vayigdal, "(and) he grew (up)." They say it refers to two stages of growth: first, when Moshe Rabeinu physically matured; and, second, when he grew in stature and distinction. The Alshich HaKodesh reiterates this question, maintaining that Moshe's growth had already been established. He explains that the added word, vayehi, "it happened," is usually a reference to a sorrowful occurrence, a negative experience. It is a lashon tzarah, a term used for denoting troubles and pain. The Torah is teaching us that when a Jew ascends to gedulah, distinction, at a time when Klal Yisrael is experiencing a tzarah, he should not say, Shalom alai nafshi, "Peace is with me," or, "Whew! I am not affected by this catastrophe." Rather, his attitude should be one of empathy, sharing in the pain of the klal, greater community. Moshe rose to gedulah during a period that was extremely painful to his brethren. Yet, he neither forgot about them, nor turned away his eye, ignoring their plight. He was one of them, and the distinction to which he arose was not going to infringe upon his relationship with Klal Yisrael. He empathized with their troubles and felt their pain. It was not simply another "growing up." It was "growing up" during a time of va'yehi, a period of trouble for his people. The Torah emphasizes his reaction - the reaction of a true Torah leader.

It is natural for a person to empathize when he is in the same predicament as his fellow who is suffering. When he is experiencing success, when the sun is shining in his face and joy fills his life, however, it is most difficult to feel the pain of one who is suffering. Moshe Rabbeinu modeled the way to do this. At a time when he was introduced to Pharaoh's royal palace, when he could have easily ignored the plight of the Jews, he chose to share in their pain, to be with them. He could have taken any position in the comfort and luxury of the palace. The "corner office" was his for the taking. Not Moshe, not Klal Yisrael's quintessential leader. He sought to be close to his brethren, to feel their pain, to work with them, to cry with them, to experience together with them the horrible slavery of Egypt.

The Ponovezer Rav, Horav Yosef Kahaneman, zl, was alone during the Holocaust. Far from his family and community, he went from place to place meeting disenfranchised Jews, encouraging them to maintain their faith, continue their prayer, and never to weaken their connection to the Almighty. He would give rousing speeches, his oratory moving, his weeping profound, his lament piercing the hearts of his listeners. Once, during one of his derashos, homilies, he broke out in bitter, uncontrolled weeping when he mentioned his own family and community in Ponovez. In the midst of his heart-rending cries he said, "Today is the Bar Mitzvah day

of my youngest son. Where is he? Who knows if he is still alive?" After his speech, the people surrounded him and asked, "Rebbe, tell us about your son. Tell us about his brilliant mind, his incredible knowledge of Torah, his wonderful deeds." The Rav's answer was, "What should I tell you? How can I speak about my son when millions of Jews - men, women and children - are being slaughtered? What is the value of one young boy when untold numbers are dying?"

This was the attitude of a gadol b'Yisrael, Torah giant. Their pain was his pain. How could he think of himself when so many others were suffering? Thoughtfulness concerning others is something that any decent human should manifest. Feeling their pain as if it were one's own pain takes superhuman effort, but it can and should be done. The daughter of Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, once told him that she had purchased a new baby carriage. She wondered if her father, with his many acquaintances, knew of anyone who could use the old one. "I would like the mitzvah of passing it on to someone in need," she said.

R' Sholom replied, "Why not give some poor person the new one?"

This was gadlus. He understood that a poor person rarely receives something new, he is always relying on the goodness of others, expecting and getting used to receiving hand-me-downs. Why not make him feel good and give him something new? He knew how the poor felt, and he felt with them.

The Talmud in Taanis 20a relates that the students of Rav Ada bar Ahavah asked him in what merit he warranted arichas yamim, longevity. He replied that he had never rejoiced at the downfall of his fellowman. We wonder what is so special about his not taking a celebratory attitude to his friend's misfortune?

Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, explains that this concept applies in an instance in which his friend had sustained a tragedy which left his life a shambles. At the same time, his home was the scene of unprecedented joy, due to the fact that his only daughter, who had taken her time selecting "Mr. Right," was finally getting married. Clearly, he had every reason to celebrate boundlessly, to make a wedding that would leave a lasting impression for generations to come. Money was no object, since he had it, and what better way to spend it than on a wedding that had been anticipated for quite some time? In this case, he had every right to do as he pleased. Yet, he did not. He downplayed his own simchah, joyous affair, so as not to infringe on his friend's sorry affairs. In order not to hurt his friend, his neighbor, another member of his community, he minimized his own affair, de-emphasizing it in such a manner that it would not cause any ill feelings for his friend. He did not have to do this, but how could he think of himself when his friend was enshrouded in pain and sorrow? This is the meaning of feeling another person's pain. Sharing in another person's emotions - whether they are sorrowful or filled with joy - catalyzes longevity.

She opened it and saw the child, and lo! A crying boy. (2:6)

The Midrash Rabba tells us that the infant Moshe was by age a yeled, child, but his nature was like a naar, boy. In other words, the child's tendency to cry was controlled. It was the angel Gavriel that struck Moshe, so that he would cry loud and be heard by Princess Bisyah. When she heard his loud weeping, she took pity on him and took him out of the water. The Maharal m'Prague reiterates this idea in his Gur Aryeh, saying that Moshe's loud crying was "motivated" by Hashem Who wanted Bisyah to hear the infant. Horav Chaim Zaitchik, zl, derives an important lesson from here. Tears are an expression of emotion. Usually, these tears reflect pain, either physical or emotional. Tears can also be tears of joy, which are catalyzed by one's overwhelming response to happiness. Moshe Rabbeinu's tears were tears of pain, as he had been struck by an angel. He was, however, struck for a purpose: so that his tears would awaken the inner compassion within the Egyptian princess, and she would save him. His tears were tears of pain, but they generated salvation and brought joy.

Human nature dictates that when one is under intense pressure-- such as when he is tested by Hashem through illness, pain or other challenges to his welfare-- he begins to worry. As his anxiety intensifies, his worry increases.

Often he begins to complain, "Why me?" "Why now?" "What did I do to deserve this?" These are normal reactions to troubling situations. If a person were to be able to pierce the heavens and observe the workings in the world of Truth, he would understand the reason for his pain, the source of misery, the purpose of his illness. Suddenly, he would discover that the troubles he was experiencing had replaced an even more painful challenge. Had he known this earlier, he certainly would have thanked the Almighty for His mercy in granting him his present nisayon, trial. In other words, we worry, we weep, we anguish, but we never bother to give Hashem the benefit of the doubt. The tears of sorrow can quickly be transformed into tears of joy by employing the tool of introspection.

We travel unaware through the road of life. While that is the way it is supposed to be, as such decisions are made in Heaven, why do most of us refuse to even think about a deeper meaning, a hidden message in life's occurrences? Why do we take it for granted that "good" things are totally good and "bad" things have a wholly negative connotation? The Navi in Yeshayah 12:1 says: "I thank You, Hashem, for You were angry at me, and now Your wrath has subsided and You have comforted me." The Talmud in Niddah 31A explains the meaning of this pasuk. It anthologizes it to two men who went on a business trip. One of them stepped on a sharp thorn. His reaction was the usual: he cursed; he yelled; he blamed everybody and anything for his misfortune. A week later, when he was informed that his colleague's ship had capsized, he offered his profound gratitude to the Almighty, realizing now that when he had stepped on the thorn, he had "gotten away easy." Hashem was kind to him by giving him what turned out to be a minor discomfort compared to what he could have received. The Talmud concludes with the statement that even the baal ha'ness, one who has experienced the miracle, is often unaware of its occurrence, simply because he neither thinks, nor looks. He is unaware until something happens. Then, he wakes up - and complains.

Moshe Rabbeinu cried as an infant because the angel was slapping him. While it was certainly painful, it was not why he was crying. Rav Zaitchik explains that Moshe's tears were tears of joy, tears of ecstasy, because he knew that these tears would bring about his salvation. He understood that just because an individual has been hit it does not mean that he has to cry in pain. The slap he receives might quite possibly open the door to his salvation. It did for Moshe. Hence, his tears were tears of joy.

And when he sees you, he will rejoice in his heart. (4:14)

Chazal teach us that in the merit of Aharon's open, embracing heart, he warranted to wear the Choshen HaMishpat, Breastplate, over his heart. The heart that was overjoyed together with the gedulah, distinction, that was accorded to his younger brother, Moshe Rabbeinu, should wear the Urim VTumim. We derive from here that from a machshavah tovah, good thought, which was the result of a middah tovah, good character trait, Aharon HaKohen merited the kedushas Kehunah, holiness that is associated with the Priesthood. He merited so many mitzvos-- offering the korbanos, sacrifices, entering into the Holy Sanctuary and serving the spiritual needs of Klal Yisrael-- all as a result of what seems to be a minor act. He was a nice man. He was sincerely happy for Moshe. This reaction was quite different from that of Korach, who created the first major rebellion in order to impugn Moshe and Aharon's leadership. His perverted sense of values clouded his perception of the Priesthood and the character refinement and personal sanctity that it required to possess in order to ascend to this lofty position.

Moshe's reaction to his new position was equally impressive: he did not want it if it meant infringing on his older brother's role. He refused to compete against Aharon - even if it meant giving up everything such as leading the Jews out of Egypt, Splitting the Red Sea and all of its accompanying miracles, and the Giving of the Torah. We wonder why Moshe would be prepared to give up all of this. These were the most seminal spiritual events in Klal Yisrael's history - epoch-making experiences. How could he give all of this up simply because it might bother Aharon?

Horav Reuven Grozovsky, zl, explains that our quintessential leader, our Rabban Shel Kol Yisrael, was acutely aware that the Torah is established only on the foundation of middos tovos, refined character traits. The reason for this is: Derech erez kadmah l'Torah - Respect and obedience /manners, etiquette and human decency, precede Torah. One cannot enter into the traklin, drawing room, of Torah without first passing through the vestibule of derech erez. Torah is the most elevated level in the development of man. One cannot ascend the ladder; he cannot reach the top, unless he has worked his way up on the rungs of middos tovos, good character traits.

One who is not concerned about the pain of his friend, his inner emotions, his feelings, cannot appreciate the crown of Torah. Forty-eight steps lead to achieving the Torah's wisdom, towards acquiring Torah. Among them are included many aspects of human relationships.

Indeed, Moshe's relationship with Hashem, his closeness with the Almighty, was catalyzed by and predicated on the foundation of feeling the pain of his fellow Jews. Chazal tell us that when Moshe went out and saw his brethren enslaved in bitter, back-breaking labor, suffering constant beating from their Egyptian taskmasters, he joined with them. He cried out, "If I could die for you, I would." Moshe began to work with the mortar, which is one of the most physically demanding forms of labor. Hashem told Moshe, "You abandoned your affairs and went to share in Klal Yisrael's burden. You acted with them as a brother, making their labor your labor, their toil your toil. In return, I will leave the elyonim, upper worlds, and descend to the lower world of human beings to converse with you." We see that Moshe became the av ha'neviim, father of the prophets, the greatest prophet, in a league all to himself, only because he took note of and reacted to his brethren's pain. The stronger the foundation, the more stable and enduring is the edifice. Moshe's nevuah was established on a foundation of brotherly love, all elements of middos tovos which comprise the foundation of derech erez. One who does not possess the quality of derech erez in its all-encompassing role-- representing middos tovos, decency, obedience and respect for others-- will not make it as a true ben Torah. While he might achieve lofty levels of scholarship, this does not make him a ben Torah.

A group of yeshiva students were sent by Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, to Horav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zl, the venerable Alter m'Slobadka. Rav Isser Zalman wanted this elite group to hear some shmuesen, ethical discourses, from the famed baal mussar, ethicist, and he also wanted the Alter to render his opinion concerning his students. After a few days, the Alter sent back the following message: "For the most part, I was very impressed. One student, however, whose reputation for brilliance precedes him, does not warrant accolades. In fact, I feel that, unfortunately, nothing much will become of him."

Rav Isser Zalman was considerably taken aback with this report, and he asked the Alter for the reason behind his remarks. The Alter replied, "When the students were served a cup of tea, some of the sugar spilled onto the tablecloth. This young man dipped his finger into the sugar and licked his finger. Clearly, he lacks the quality of derech erez. This is enough for me to make a decision about him. His lack of derech erez is a defining point in his character."

Regrettably, the Alter's words proved right. A few years later, the young man became a rav in a small town. A short while later he was forced to leave this post and instead assume a position as a judge. A few years later, it became public knowledge that as a judge, he had validated, for a price, a number of false documents. He was indicted and jailed, thus ending the bright future of a distinguished Torah scholar, all because he was missing the most important ingredient in his foundation of learning: derech erez.

Retzon yireiav yaaseh, v'es shavasam yishma v'yoshiem. He will do the will of those who fear Him; He will hear their cries and save them.

Simply, this means that Hashem hears our pleas and He helps when it is appropriate. Horav Shimon Schwab, zl, comments that he once heard an alternative explanation of this verse. Retzon yireiav yaaseh literally means Hashem "creates the will" of those who fear Him. In other words, the desires of yereim, G-d-fearing people, exist because Hashem causes them to

have these desires. He inspires us to have correct and proper desires. Rav Schwab goes on to interpret this into the statement of Rabban Gamliel, who says in Pirkei Avos 2:4, Asei retzono ki'retzonecha, "Do His will as if it were your will." A person should perform every mitzvah with the same cheishek, desire, as if this is what he would want for himself. The reward for this is that Hashem will actually make you want what He wants.

Thus, the verse is saying: The reward of those who fear G-d will be that Hashem will make them want what He wants. Since such people only want what He wants, He will hear their pleas and respond favorably. They are in "agreement" regarding what "they" both want.

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Parashat Shemot: The Uniqueness of Moshe Rabbenu
The beginning of the third chapter of Sefer Shemot records Moses' encounter with G-d at the "burning bush." It begins as follows:

Now Moses, tending the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian, drove the flock into the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. An angel of the L-rd appeared to him in a blazing fire out of a bush. He gazed, and there was a bush all aflame, yet the bush was not consumed. Moses said, "I must turn aside to look at this marvelous sight; why is the bush not burnt?" When the L-RD was that he had turned aside to look, G-d called to him out of the bush: "Moses! Moses!" He answered, "Here I am." And He said, "Do not come closer. Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am," He said, "the G-d of your father, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

The uniqueness of Moses' prophecy is enshrined by Rambam in his list of Thirteen Principles, found in his Perush Ha-Mishnah to Massekhet Sanhedrin Pereq Heleq (the 10th chapter). It goes (in part) as follows:

The 7th fundamental principle is the prophecy of Moses, our teacher, that is to say, we should believe that he is the father of all the prophets that preceded him and that followed him. All are below him in rank. He was chosen by G-d from all of mankind. He reached a greater understanding of G-d than any man who ever existed or will ever exist will be able to reach. He attained such an extreme state of exaltedness above the level of a human being that he reached to the level of a celestial being and became established at the angelic level. There was no curtain which he did not pierce. No physical impediment held him back and no defect, whether small or great, troubled him. The imaginative powers and sensations were separated from him in all his perceptions and his power of lust was silenced. And he remained pure intellect only. It is in this sense that it is said to him that he spoke to G-d without the mediation of angels. (See Fred Rosner, Maimonides' Commentary on the Mishnah: Tractate Sanhedrin [New York, 1981], p. 153.)

In light of these words (which are repeated in Mishneh Torah, and {with some variation} in the Guide for the Perplexed), another famous Maimonidean passage becomes difficult to fathom. It is written in the course of the Rambam's stirring declaration in Hilkhos Teshuvah (5:2) regarding the Jewish assertion of man's absolute freedom of will. It goes as follows:

Let not the notion, expressed by foolish gentiles and most of the senseless folk among Israelites, pass through your mind that at the beginning of a person's existence the Almighty decrees that he is to be either righteous or wicked. This is not so. Every human being may become righteous like Moses, our teacher, or wicked like Jeroboam; wise or foolish, merciful or cruel, niggardly or generous; and so with other qualities. (Rambam, The Book of Knowledge: translated by Moses Hyamson {Jerusalem, 1965}, p. 86b-87a)

But if it the uniqueness of Moshe Rabbenu is an article of faith, then how could any human being become righteous like Moses? Wouldn't the actualization of that possibility contradict that dogma of Judaism?

Numerous answers have been suggested: the common denominator of virtually all of them is that the term "righteousness," however defined, in truth does not include those intellectual capabilities (and/or the prophetic powers) that made Moses the greatest prophet ever to have lived, and the unique and never-to-be-repeated role he has in Judaism. Thus, to the extent that a simple reading of the Hilkhos Teshuvah passage could be construed to be absolute and to include those intellectual

capabilities and / or prophetic powers, in truth it only expresses the Rambam's use of rhetorical excess to underline his assertion of human free will.

R. Aharon Soloveichick, zatzal, (in a shiur delivered circa 1986 at YU that I heard) once suggested a slightly different interpretation. Perhaps the Rambam in Hilkhos Teshuvah, he declared, was only claiming that theoretically anyone could utilize their freedom of choice (to make correct decisions) every second of their lives and consequently reach the heights that Moshe Rabbenu did. In actuality however, no one else did so, and no one else will ever do so. Consequently, no one became, and no one else will ever become, as great as Moshe. The 7th iqqar, in this view, expresses the situation based upon the reality of the imperfection of the rest of humanity vis a vis Moshe Rabbenu.

Whether one follows the standard explanations or this last one, I think that this notion is ultimately bound up with the notion of the principle of plenitude, which various philosophers, including Rambam, subscribed to. This principle teaches that if the universe is to be as perfect as possible it must be as full as possible, in the sense that it contains as many kinds of things as it possibly could contain. For example, the world of nature must be as rich as possible. This is connected with the idea, used by various philosophers, as part of the ontological argument for God's existence. That is, there must be a most Perfect Being possible, that existence is a perfection, and hence what we call G-d is that most Perfect Being. Another version of the principle refers to events rather than to kinds of objects. It says that there can be no possibilities that remain as possibilities (and are not foreclosed) but are unrealized throughout eternity; in this form, the notion goes back at least to Aristotle.

It would seem that there is a principle of plenitude regarding human beings as well. There had to have been (and there was!) a greatest human being ever, and according to Jewish dogma, that one is Moses. (For an important scholarly article on the general topic, see Charles Manekin, "Problems of Plenitude in Maimonides and Gersonides," in *A Straight Path: Studies in Medieval Philosophy and Culture. Essays in Honor of Arthur Hyman*, edited by Ruth Link-Salinger. [Washington, D.C., 1988], pp. 183-94.)

But if this is all correct, I think that there are repercussions regarding how we as thinking, religious Jews, look at the biblical narratives regarding Moshe. None of us, no matter how talented and brilliant, will approach Moshe. Our human qualities of emotion and imagination, which itself is a function of our corporeality, preclude that. We might try to approach his intellectual qualities as presented in the Maimonidean texts, but we must recognize that we will not do so. At the most, just as our imperative of *Imitatio Dei* (the imitation of God: just as He is kind, we should be kind, etc.) concerns, as Rambam teaches us, not God's essence (which is absolutely unfathomable), but God's actions in this world, we can only try to imitate Moshe's actions. That is all. More importantly, our fealty towards Moshe is the fealty towards the Law that he bequeathed us, the Torah, with its commands and prohibitions. And at the end of the day, our intellectual energies must be primarily absorbed in understanding that Law. Moses charged us with the Teaching: as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob (Deuteronomy 33:4). To subscribe to this email list, please click [here](#) To view more shiurim on Parashat Shemot, please click [here](#) Yeshiva University Center for the Jewish Future 500 W 185th St. New York, New York 10033

neglect each other, when we are callous or self-absorbed, when we turn against our fellow Jews, we block the geula. During these last few weeks, while living in Jerusalem, I sensed a cohesiveness among the people in the streets. Religious, secular, whatever skin tone or accent, Jews seemed to be drawing close. Sometimes the scourge of war at our borders can bring about that *achdus*. The Ralbag teaches us that we shouldn't wait for our fear to bring forth our kindness! Whatever our circumstances, being considerate and sensitive is good for us always. Moreover, it is the key to releasing us from the shackles of suffering. Good Shabbos. D Fox

from **Rabbi Dr. David Fox** PROFFOX@aol.com to
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subject A thought on Parshas Shmos A Thought on Parshas
Shmos "...va'yomas Yosef v'chol echav v'chol ha'dor ha'hu..." "...and Yosef died,
and all of his brothers and all of that generation..." (1:6) This verse seems to
preface the events which follow, which recount the saga of Moshe needing to flee
Egypt in reaction to the danger he was in. That danger, we learn, came about because
other Jews spoke ill of him. The Ralbag observes that the Torah is teaching us one
of the reasons that exile lasts so long. When our people fail to care for one another,
when we create strife and foster ill will among ourselves, the ordeal of *golus*
increases and our exile persists. The only solution for ending our exile is to focus on
closeness with the Divine, yet the key for drawing closer is becoming closer as a
nation. This is the reason that the passage begins with the above verse. Yosef and
his brothers had their differences. We learned about those in the closing parshios of
Bereishis. Yet, as we learned last week in the final passages of *Va'yechi*, the brothers
resolved their issues. They made amends. They forgave and drew close again. That is
why, says the Ralbag, the suffering of exile could not begin as long as they were
alive. They lived in a manner which fended off the national exile. They settled their
differences. As long as they were alive, the harsh decree of *golus* was in abeyance.
Only upon the passing of that blessed and exemplary generation would the yoke of
exile be felt. This is why our verse, which at first seems like a historical footnote, is
the explanatory prelude to how the oppression in Egypt began. When we Jews
interact with compassion, when we collaborate on worthy causes, when we draw near
and are supportive and caring, we hold the key to bringing about *geula*. When we

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Sam Friedman is a physician living in Teaneck, New Jersey. He is an alumnus of Yeshiva University and Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavne. He feels privileged to have learned Torah from Rabbi Shmuel Scheinberg, Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Goldvicht, and Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik.

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Kindness Equals Torah

The Torah says that the daughter of Pharaoh went to bathe by the river and saw Moshe's basket among the reeds. When she saw Moshe, who was then approximately three months old, crying, "וַתַּחַמַּל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי־לִדִי הֵעֲבָרִים זֶה" "...*She took pity* on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrew boys'" (*Shemos* 2:6). The Torah points out that the daughter of Pharaoh *first had pity* on Moshe, and then realized that he was one of the Hebrew babies. The Torah tells us over the next several sentences that, despite this realization, she rescued the baby, named him Moshe, and raised him as a son.

Rabbi Yissocher Frand is a well-known contemporary author of many magnificent Torah thoughts and a teacher in Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore. Rabbi Frand quotes Rav Nissan Alpert, זצ"ל (who passed away in 1986, and was a scholar, communal leader, teacher, and a student of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל):

It is no coincidence that the word רַחֲמִים (kindness) always precedes the word אֱמֶת (truth) wherever the two terms are used together in the Torah (for example: *Bereishis* 24:49, *Shemos* 34:6, *Yehoshua* 2:14). If אֱמֶת (truth) would precede רַחֲמִים (kindness), we would never reach רַחֲמִים (kindness)... A person's natural reaction must be רַחֲמִים (kindness) first. It may subsequently be tempered with אֱמֶת (truth), but the initial response must be רַחֲמִים (kindness).

Similarly, if Pharaoh's daughter, whom God named Basya (בַּתְּיָצָה), had thought about the situation logically, before feeling pity for Moshe, she probably would never have adopted him. She would have reasoned that he was a Hebrew baby, and her father had decreed that newborn Hebrew boys should be killed. However, the Torah points out that *she had pity* on him, and only afterwards took into account that he was a Hebrew baby. *Basya adopted Moshe because רַחֲמִים (kindness) came before אֱמֶת (truth).*

The *Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3 states that God named Pharaoh's daughter Basya, which means daughter of God, because of the kindness she showed to Moshe. This

Midrash teaches, "He [Moshe] was not your son and you called him your son, so too, you are not my daughter, and I will call you my daughter, as it says '...וְאֵלֶּה בְּנֵי בִתּוּתָהּ בַּת פַּרְעֹה...'" ('...and these are the sons of Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh...') (*Divrei Hayamim* I 4:18)."

The above insight, that *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) should always precede *אֱמוּנָה* (truth), is found in Rabbi Alpert's book, *Limudei Nissan*, which was published posthumously. Rabbi Frand mentions that Rabbi Alpert quoted this insight when he delivered a eulogy for his teacher, Rav Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל. Rav Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986) was the *Rosh Yeshiva* (Dean) of Mesivta Tifereth Yerushalayim in New York City, and was one of the foremost leaders and *halachic* authorities of his time. Rabbi Alpert said that Rabbi Feinstein always viewed a situation from a *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) perspective, before examining the situation from the angle of *אֱמוּנָה* (truth). For this reason, Rav Alpert pointed out, many Rabbis found that it was easy to obtain letters of recommendation for their publications from Rabbi Feinstein. In addition, needy people who were looking for reference letters found that it was easy to get help from Rabbi Feinstein.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein personified Basya's example and the teaching of our Torah that *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) should always precede *אֱמוּנָה* (truth). According to Rabbi Frand:

That was Basya's spirit, and that was the spirit she imbued into Moshe *Rabbeinu* (our teacher). For that is the spirit that a Jewish leader must have, the spirit of *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) and then *אֱמוּנָה* (truth). If we allow *אֱמוּנָה* (truth) to come first, we will never reach *חַסְדִּים* (kindness).

Rabbi Alpert, in his book *Limudei Nissan*, points out that the lesson to be learned from Basya is that if you see a person in danger, pity should be the overriding factor, so that you will do whatever is possible to save the person, even if it is very difficult. Moshe learned this lesson well, as the Torah tells us in the next few sentences that Moshe saved a Jew who was being attacked by an Egyptian (*Shemos* 2:12). A few sentences later, Moshe saved Yisro's daughters from the shepherds (*Shemos* 2:17). These two examples are found in the Torah only a few sentences after Basya "...took pity on him and said, This is one of the Hebrew boys" (*Shemos* 2:6). Perhaps this is because Moshe learned from Basya the importance of placing *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) before *אֱמוּנָה* (truth), and to do whatever is possible to save a person in danger.

The *Midrash* in *Shemos Rabbah* 1:26, which was probably edited between 400-500 C.E., states:

From here you can infer *how great is the reward of those who perform kind acts* (גוֹמְלֵי חַסְדִּים); for although Moshe had many names, the name by which he is known throughout the Torah is the one which Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh, called him, and even God called him by no other name.

The *Gemora*, in *Megillah* 13a, records that Moshe had six other meaningful names, and the *Midrash* in *Vayikra Rabbah* 1:3 says that Moshe had ten names in total. Basya had mercy and showed great kindness by raising Moshe. The only name that the Torah and God use is Moshe, the name given to him by Basya, to repay her for this kindness.

Rabbi Moshe Yechiel Epstein (1890-1971), זצ"ל, who was known as the Rebbe from Ozhorov, writes in *Ba'ar Moshe* that Moshe's name should always remind us *how great is the reward of those who perform kind acts* (גוֹמְלֵי חַסְדִּים). As the *Midrash* quoted above teaches, despite the fact that Moshe had many meaningful names, the Torah and God use only the name Moshe, to repay Basya for the *חַסְדִּים* (kindness) that she showed to Moshe. Thus, whenever one sees or hears Moshe's name, it should remind one of the greatness of *חַסְדִּים* (kindness).

The Rebbe from Ozhorov quotes the *Gemora* in *Sotah* 14a, תּוֹרָה תְּחִלָּתָהּ גְּמִילוּת חַסְדִּים "The Torah - its beginning is the performance of kindness and its end is the performance of kindness." The *Gemora* explains that towards the beginning of the Torah, in *Bereishis* 3:21, God made garments and put them on Adam and Chava, and towards the end of the Torah, in *Devarim* 34:6, God personally buried Moshe. This *Gemora* emphasizes, according to the Maharsha (acronym for Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Adels, 1555-1631, one of the foremost *Gemora* commentators), that the Torah is essentially a book of *חַסְדִּים* (kindness). The second *Mishna* in *Pirkei Avos* lists the performance of acts of kindness as one of the three things on which the world stands. The *Gemora* in *Avodah*

Zarah 17b teaches that if one occupies himself with the study of Torah, without the performance of acts of kindness, it is as if he has no God. The Maharsha explains that "it is as if he has no God to save him," because God performs acts of kindness and he should emulate God to also perform acts of kindness. Perhaps what the Maharsha means is that if one doesn't perform acts of kindness, he will not be deserving, when he is in trouble, to have God perform acts of kindness to save him.

Perhaps our doing acts of kindness is our way to pay back God for all the kindness that He does for us. Indeed, Rabbi Moshe Lieber, in his commentary on *Pirkei Avos*, quotes another contemporary scholar, Rabbi A. C. Feuer, that the term **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** literally means the *repaying* of acts of kindness. When one does acts of kindness, that is the best way to repay God for the acts of kindness that God does for him. The *Gemora*, also in *Sotah 14a*, teaches that people are responsible to emulate God's attributes, which consist of the performance of acts of kindness such as supplying clothes for those in need, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, and burying the dead. The *Gemora* in *Shabbos* 133b states similarly, "Just as [God] is gracious and compassionate, you also should be gracious and compassionate." This is consistent with the *Gemora* in *Sotah 14a* and the explanation of the Maharsha quoted above that the Torah is essentially a book of **חֲסָד** (kindness). The Rebbe from Ozhorov writes in *Ba`ar Moshe* that the idea that the Torah is essentially a book of **חֲסָד** (kindness) teaches that one shouldn't perform acts of kindness because they are logical or because one hopes to be paid back in some fashion, but only because the Torah commands us to do them.

The Rebbe from Ozhorov points out beautifully that the numerical value of the word **תּוֹרָה** (Torah) is equivalent to the numerical value of the words **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** (performing acts of kindness)!!! The letters of the Hebrew alphabet, unlike English, are each assigned a specific numerical value. The word **תּוֹרָה** (Torah) adds up to 611 as follows: **ת**=400, **ו**=6, **ר**=200, **ה**=5; $400+6+200+5=611$. This is exactly equivalent to the numerical value of **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** which is also 611 ($3+40+10+30+6+400+8+60+4+10+40=611$). *These numerical values are exactly equivalent, because, as noted above, the Torah is essentially a book of חֲסָד (kindness)!*

In addition, the Rebbe from Ozhorov points out, **עוֹלָה, כִּי מוֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ נִקְרָא בְּדָבָר כִּי מוֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ** "And there is a wonderful hint, because **מוֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ** (Moshe, our teacher) has the same numerical value as **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** (with acts of kindness)." The numerical value of **מוֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ** (Moshe, our teacher) is 613, which is exactly equal to the number of commandments in the Torah, and also the numerical value of **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** (with acts of kindness). This is reminiscent of the ideas emphasized above, that the Torah's utilization of the name Moshe is a repayment for Basya's **חֲסָד** (kindness), and an important reminder of the greatness of **חֲסָד** (kindness). Thus, **מוֹשֶׁה רַבֵּינוּ** (Moshe, our teacher), the 613 commandments, **תּוֹרָה** (Torah), and **בְּגִמְלוֹת חֲסָדִים** (performing acts of kindness) are intertwined conceptually and numerically.