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Shema Koleinu
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Suspecting the Innocent **Rabbi Michael Taubes**

When Moshe Rabbeinu is told by Hashem at the burning bush that he should go and inform Bnei Yisrael that Hashem has spoken to him and will soon redeem them from slavery, he reacts by stating that the people will not believe he's telling the truth (Shemos 4:1). Hashem immediately responds by giving Moshe two signs that he may show the people to prove the veracity of his claim; as part of the second sign, Moshe's hand becomes afflicted with Tzora'as (ibid Pasuk 6). The Gemara in Shabbos (97a) understands that this affliction was not merely a random sign for Moshe to use, because, as Rav Achai Gaon explains in the She'iltos, (Sheilta 40), Hashem could have selected any number of other signs. Rather, he chose a sign which contained a lesson, indeed a punishment, for Moshe himself because he had suspected Bnei Yisrael of not believing him. The Gemara thus derives from this story that one who is Choshed B'ksheirim, that is, he unjustly suspects innocent people, is punished with a physical affliction as Moshe was.

The Mishnah in Yoma (18b) states that as part of the preparation for the Avodah in the Beis Hamikdash on Yom Kippur, the elders among the Kohanim would have the Kohein Gadol swear that he would not alter the service in any way; following this, both the Kohein Gadol and the elders would cry. The Gemara (ibid 19b) explains that he would cry because they even suspected him of being a Tzeduki (coming from that group of people who do not believe in the validity of the Torah SheB'al Peh or the authority of the Rabbanan), and they would cry because if they were indeed being suspicious of an innocent man, they would be deserving of

the above cited punishment which is visited upon one who is Choshed B'ksheirim. The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuvah 4:4) lists Choshed B'ksheirim as one of the Aveiros which prevents a person from being able to fully do Teshuva, explaining that people do not even realize that it is an Aveirah to consider a good person to be a sinner; people will therefore rarely even attempt to do Teshuva for this Aveirah. It is clear from the above that it is prohibited to suspect an innocent person of being a sinner.

Does this prohibition apply to one's attitude towards all people, or is it possible that sometimes one may indeed be suspicious of someone else? The Rambam, in discussing the case of the Kohein Gadol (Hilchos Yom Hakippurim 1:7), implies that it is prohibited to suspect anyone whose actions and motivations are not known, because perhaps he has nothing wrong in mind. In his Peirush on the above Mishnahin Yoma (Perek 1: Mishnah 5), the Rambam likewise writes that it is forbidden to suspect someone whose actions are unclear and might be bad; the Tosafos Yom Tov (ibid: V'Hein) on that Mishnah accepts this as well. This position appears to work out very nicely with that of the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Perek 1: Mishnah 6) which states "He've dan et kol adam l'kaf zechus", teaching that one should judge all people favorable, a trait which the Rambam (Hilchos De'os 5:7) says must be possessed by a Talmid Chochom. Rashi there (ibid Vehevei) asserts that unless one knows otherwise for sure, one should assume that other people's actions are all good, and, citing a Gemara in Shabbos (Daf 127b), writes that one who does this will himself be judged favorably by Hashem.

The Beraisa in Masseches Kallah Rabbasi (Perek 9), however, states that one should always consider another person to be like a thief (at least potentially), which, of course, implies the exact opposite. The Gemara there (ibid) immediately questions this statement based on another Mishnah in Pirkei Avos (Perek 2: Mishnah 4) which teaches that one should not judge someone else [negatively, as the Bartenura (ibid s.v. V'al Tadin) points out there] until one has been in that situation, implying, again, that one should not suspect another person without knowing all the facts. The Gemara (ibid) responds that in Pirkei Avos, the Mishnah (ibid) is talking about a person whom one knows—he should not be judged unfavorably unless all the facts are clear. In Masseches Kallah Rabbasi, however, the Beraisa (ibid) is referring to a person whom one does not know—he may justifiably be suspected of being wicked.

Rabbeinu Yonah, explaining the Mishnah in Pirkei Avos about judging others favorably (Perek 1: Mishnah 6), writes that one should judge the average person favorably whether one knows him or not, adding in his Sha'arei Teshuva (Sha'ar 3:218) that this is required by the Torah, but someone who is known to be a wicked person should always be viewed in a negative or suspicious light. The Klei Yakar, commenting on the Posuk in the Torah (Vayikra 19:15) quoted by the Gemara in Shevuos (30a) as the source for the idea of judging people favorably, notes as well (B'Tzedek) that a wicked person should not be judged favorably because the assumption is that he has remained wicked; one is not considered a choshed b'ksheirim for suspecting such a person because this person is not considered to be among the k'sheirim. The Bartenura on that Mishnah (ibid Vehevei) also writes that physical punishment is inflicted only upon a choshed b'ksheirim but one who is choshed a rasha) has done nothing wrong. We see from here that this prohibition to be suspicious of other people is not necessarily all-encompassing; there are possible exceptions.

Because of this prohibition, though, it is also necessary for one to avoid doing things that make other people suspicious of him. Rabbeinu Yehuda HaChassid notes in his Sefer Chassidim (Siman 44) that one who causes suspicions to be raised about himself is responsible for the reactions of the people who see him, and hence, their punishment, when applicable. There may, however, be a distinction between an individual and a large group of people because one won't usually suspect an entire

group of being sinners. The Gemara in Avodah Zarah (43b) indeed says that the prohibition of being choshed does not apply regarding a group; we thus need not worry that someone will be choshed an entire group. The Ramo (Yoreh Deah 141:4) rules accordingly, and an activity forbidden to an individual because it may raise suspicions about him may therefore be permissible for a group.

This last ruling is debated by the Poskim, but the Magen Avraham (Orach Chaim 244:8) concurs, explaining that a non-Jew may thus do certain work for a community on Shabbos which he wouldn't be able to do for an individual because there will be no suspicion of an entire community. He therefore rules that strictly speaking, although it has been forbidden for other reasons, a non-Jew may, under certain circumstances, work on building a Shul on Shabbos because nobody will think that the community sinned by hiring him. The Chasam Sofer (Sha'ailos U'Teshuvos- Orach Chaim: 60) suggests that this is true only for something like a Shul where the community participates in it together, but if many people happen to be doing the thing, each on his own behalf, then a problem is created because they are then like individuals who must avoid suspicious activities, even though there are many of them. The Pardes Yosef on the Posuk in this Parsha (Shemos posuk 2) quotes that perhaps this is why Moshe was punished despite being suspicious of a group; he was really being suspicious of each of Bnai Yisrael as individuals.

<http://www.rabbisacks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/CC-5774-Shemot-Women-as-Leaders.pdf>

Covenant & Conversation

Thoughts on the Weekly Parsha from

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks

Former Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth

Women as Leaders

This week's parsha could be entitled "The birth of a leader." We see Moses, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, growing up as a prince of Egypt. We see him as a young man, for the first time realising the implications of his true identity. He is, and knows he is, a member of an enslaved and suffering people: "Growing up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people" (Ex. 2: 10). He intervenes. He acts: the mark of a true leader. We see him intervene three times, twice in Egypt, once in Midian, to rescue victims of violence. We then witness the great scene at the burning bush where God summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until God becomes angry and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the childhood of a hero. But this is only the surface. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another and far more remarkable story, not about a hero but about six heroines, six courageous women without whom there would not have been a Moses. First is Yocheved, wife of Amram and mother of the three people who were to become the great leaders of the Israelites: Miriam, Aaron and Moses himself. It was Yocheved who, at the height of Egyptian persecution, had the courage to have a child, hide him for three months, and then devise a plan to give him a chance of being rescued. We know all too little of Yocheved. In her first appearance in the Torah she is unnamed. Yet, reading the narrative, we are left in no doubt about her bravery and resourcefulness. Not by accident did her children all become leaders. The second was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter and Moses' elder sister. It was she who kept watch over the child as the ark floated down the river, and who approached Pharaoh's daughter with the suggestion that he be nursed among his own people. The biblical text paints a portrait of the young Miriam as a figure of unusual fearlessness and presence of mind. Rabbinic tradition went

further. In a remarkable midrash, we read of how the young Miriam confronted her father Amram and persuaded him to change his mind. Hearing of the decree that every male Israelite baby would be drowned in the river, Amram led the Israelites in divorcing their wives so that there would be no more children. He had logic on his side. Could it be right to bring children into the world if there were a fifty per cent chance that they would be killed at birth? Yet Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him. "Your decree," she said, "is worse than Pharaoh's. His affects only the boys; yours affects all. His deprives children of life in this world; yours will deprive them of life even in the world to come." Amram relented, and as a result, Moses was born.[1] The implication is clear: Miriam had more faith than her father. Third and fourth were the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who frustrated Pharaoh's first attempt at genocide. Told to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1: 17). Summoned and accused of disobedience, they outwitted Pharaoh by constructing an ingenious cover story: the Hebrew women, they said, are vigorous and give birth before we arrive. They escaped punishment and saved lives. The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilization: the idea that there are moral limits to power. There are instructions that should not be obeyed. There are crimes against humanity that cannot be excused by the claim that "I was only obeying orders." This concept, generally known as "civil disobedience," is usually attributed to the nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau, and entered international consciousness after the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. Its true origin, though, lay thousands of years earlier in the actions of two women, Shifra and Puah. Through their understated courage they earned a high place among the moral heroes of history, teaching us the primacy of conscience over conformity, the law of justice over the law of the land.[2] The fifth is Zipporah, Moses' wife. The daughter of a Midianite priest, she was nonetheless determined to accompany Moses on his mission to Egypt, despite the fact that she had no reason to risk her life on such a hazardous venture. In a deeply enigmatic passage, it was she who saved Moses' life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4: 24-26). The impression we have of her is of a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, gave a better sense than Moses himself of what God requires. I have saved until last the most intriguing of them all: Pharaoh's daughter. It was she who had the courage to rescue an Israelite child and bring it up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people. Could we imagine a daughter of Hitler, or Eichmann, or Stalin, doing the same? There is something at once heroic and gracious about this lightly sketched figure, the woman who gave Moses his name. Who was she? The Torah does not give her a name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4: 18) mentions a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she the sages identified as the woman who saved Moses. The name Bitya (sometimes rendered as Batya) means "the daughter of God". From this, the sages drew one of their most striking lessons: The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: "Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You are not My daughter, but I shall call you My daughter." [3] They added that she was one of the few (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.[4] So, on the surface, the parsha is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women with whom there would not have been a Moses. They belong to a long tradition of strong women throughout Jewish history, from Deborah, Hannah, Ruth and Esther in the Bible to more modern figures like Sarah Schenirer and Nechama Leibowitz to more secular figures like Anne Frank, Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir. How then, if women emerge so powerfully as leaders, were they excluded in Jewish law from certain leadership roles? If we look carefully we will see

that women were historically excluded from two areas. One was the “crown of priesthood,” which went to Aaron and his sons. The other was the “crown of kingship,” which went to David and his sons. These were two roles built on the principle of dynastic succession. From the third crown – the “crown of Torah” – however, women were not excluded. There were prophetesses, not just prophets. The sages enumerated seven of them. There were great women Torah scholars from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) to today. At stake is a more general distinction. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in his Responsa, Binyan Av, differentiates between formal or official authority (samchut) and actual leadership (hanhagah).[5] There are figures who hold positions of authority – prime ministers, presidents, CEOs – who may not be leaders at all. They may have the power to force people to do what they say, but they have no followers. They excite no admiration. They inspire no emulation. And there may be leaders who hold no official position at all but who are turned to for advice and are held up as role models. They have no power but great influence. Israel’s prophets belonged to this category. So, often, did the gedolei Yisrael, the great sages of each generation. Neither Rashi nor Maimonides held any official position (some scholars say that Maimonides was chief rabbi of Egypt but most hold that he was not, though his descendants were). Wherever leadership depends on personal qualities – what Max Weber called charismatic authority – and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men. Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Zipporah and Batya were leaders not because of any official position they held (in the case of Batya she was a leader despite her official title as a princess of Egypt). They were leaders because they had courage and conscience. They refused to be intimidated by power or defeated by circumstance. They were the real heroes of the exodus. Their courage is still a source of inspiration today. [1] Shemot Rabbah 1: 13. [2] There is, of course, a midrashic tradition that Shifra and Puah were other names for Yocheved and Miriam. In the text I am following the interpretation given by Abarbanel and Luzzatto. [3] Vayikra Rabbah 1: 3. [4] Derekh Eretz Zuta 1. [5] Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, Responsa Binyan Av, 2nd edn., no. 65. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks is a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and moral voice for our time. Until 1st September 2013 he served as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, having held the position for 22 years. To read more from Rabbi Sacks or to subscribe to his mailing list, please visit www.rabbisacks.org.

<http://torahweb.org/thisWeek.html>

Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

The Greatest of Men, the Most Humble of Men

There are four, seemingly distinct, areas in which Moshe excels. First, he is the “anav mikol adam - the humblest of men” (Bamidbar 12:3). Second, upon his death the Torah testifies about him “v’lo kom navi od b’Yisroel k’Moseh - no greater prophet arose in Israel than Moshe” (Devarim 34:10). Next, Moshe is referred to throughout the Tanach as the eved Hashem - the servant of Hashem (Devarim 34:5, Yehoshua 1:2, Malachi 3:22). Moshe’s eved Hashem status is expanded upon further when Hashem states, “lo chein avdi Moshe; bechol baysi ne’eman hu - my servant Moshe is different and is trusted throughout my home.” Lastly, to his people he is known as Moseh Rabbeinu - Moshe our teacher; he is the rebbe par excellence. Moshe’s essence is described as prophet, loyal servant of Hashem, teacher and yet forever humble. Do these traits just happen to coincide to make up this great man, or is there a common thread that unites these different aspects of Moshe’s personality?

It is the humility of Moshe that enables him to reach the great heights he attains in the other areas, for his ultimate greatness lies in his ability to not focus on himself. Notwithstanding his great talents and abilities,

Moshe’s humility is an expression of his conviction that everything he has accomplished is because Hashem has been assisting him. He sees himself as an eved Hashem, and just as a loyal servant doesn’t focus on his own desires but strives to please his master, so too Moshe the anav is Moshe the eved.

The heights of prophecy and Torah knowledge reached by Moshe were a direct result of his humility. Similarly, the days of Moshiach are described as a time when “ki mal’ah ha’aretz da’as es Hashem kamayim layam mechasim - the earth will be filled with the knowledge of Hashem as the water covers the seas” (Yeshaya 11:9.) Knowledge of Hashem is described using an analogy to water because water can only collect when a hole (i.e. an empty space) exists. So too, one must nullify one’s self to Hashem to receive His knowledge. Moshe who was the greatest anav reached the highest level of prophecy and also reached the highest level of Torah attainable by man.

This characteristic of not focusing on oneself not only shapes our relationship with Hashem, but also molds our interactions with our fellow man. Moshe models this selflessness in the area of interpersonal relations as well: Putting himself at risk, Moshe saves the life of a Jewish slave; rather than living the life of a prince far away from the plight of his brethren, he negates his own needs to care for others; Moshe refuses to let the daughters of Yisro suffer at the hands of shepherds who mistreat them, but rather intercedes to protect these total strangers; Moshe hesitates to become the leader of the Jewish people fearing it will offend his older brother; He will not begin his mission before receiving permission from Yisro to whom he owed a debt of gratitude. This selfless sensitivity to both relative and stranger is an expression of the trait of humility that personified Moshe.

The Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 5:2) observes that every person can become a tzaddik like Moshe. Although we cannot attain the levels of prophecy or Torah knowledge reached by Moshe we can perfect ourselves in the trait of humility. By following the example of Moshe, our relationship with both Hashem and fellow man can reach great heights.

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from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
reply-to: info@jewishdestiny.com

subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

In My Opinion :: Rabbi Berel Wein

Frustrations

Though ordinarily I think myself to be a calm and accepting person – personality traits that I feel imperative to be part of a rabbi’s makeup – I am easily internally frustrated. I just spent a restful and peaceful and most enjoyable Shabat at home with my wife. I felt perfectly well, thank God, but I was unable to walk to my synagogue due to the great snowstorm that visited Jerusalem over the past few days.

Discretion was the better part of valor and I did not wish to venture out to the uphill and return downhill trek to the synagogue with all of the snow and ice underfoot. My snow-walking equipment – boots and all – are safely stored in New York. I was therefore completely unprepared to undertake the adventure of climbing and descending Jerusalem’s snow packed and icy streets.

To further complicate the situation, a very large tree branch fell from the weight of the snow directly in front of the front gate to our house. Thus, under even the best of circumstances, getting out of my house would have been somewhat of an obstacle course. And at my current position in life I am always looking for smooth sailing and obstacle free paths.

So therefore the great Rabbi Wein stayed at home, a prisoner of elements over which he had no control whatsoever. This engendered within me a nagging feeling of internal frustration. It was aimless frustration, for usually we are frustrated at someone but here I could not be frustrated at anyone in particular. And objectless frustration is the worst type of frustration to suffer.

We are all aware of the constant daily frustrations in life that we endure. The lines at the post office and the banks are always long and slow moving. Dealing with any governmental agency in any country in the world is never a pleasant or simple matter and Israel happily is part of the family of nations in this respect. Yet these frustrations are minor and expected for our modern world is loaded with frustrations. Mobile phones that constantly drop calls, computers that stubbornly refuse to obey commands, automobiles that refuse to function when one most needs them to, schools that don't always understand our children's needs and personalities - these are only a few of the omnipresent frustrations that we moderns face daily. But all of these frustrations have an object upon which we may vent our blame and wrath.

But who can be blamed for a foot of snow in a country that has basically a desert climate? So we attribute it to climate change and global warming, etc. but those are weak explanations of freak phenomena and being frustrated with the weather forecaster is comparable to shooting the messenger and not dealing with the message.

We can only say that our frustration at the weather is a product of our realization of how puny we really are in the face of nature and Heaven. We should therefore be overcome with a feeling of humility rather than that of futile frustration.

So upon further reflection I contentedly stored away in my mind the glorious sermon that I was going to deliver in the synagogue this past Shabat. I regret not being able to teach the Torah classes in the synagogue but I am comforted by the fact that I was able to devote a few hours of rather intensive study of a book of interesting insights in Talmudic subjects authored by a great Torah scholar. And I relaxed on Shabat in a manner that I am not usually able to.

And though I still had this gnawing feeling of vague frustration at being somewhere that my routine told me I was not supposed to be, I was somehow able to sublimate it for most of the holy day. But the frustration returned with a vengeance after the conclusion of the Shabat. Hence this essay, which is meant to dissipate that frustration.

Confession is good for the soul and writing has always been a catharsis for me. So, in a strange way, writing about my frustration serves to alleviate that very feeling of frustration. I am looking forward to the snow finally melting, the fallen limbs of trees being removed and a return to the normal and usual frustrations of life in a few days.

I hope that this essay will serve to calm your nerves as well whatever types of frustrations you are currently suffering from. The rabbis taught us that troubles that befall all of us in equal portion are the themselves a partial comfort to the human condition. So may it be with our frustrations.

Shabat shalom

from: Destiny Foundation/Rabbi Berel Wein <info@jewishdestiny.com>
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subject: Weekly Parsha from Rabbi Berel Wein

**Weekly Parsha :: Rabbi Berel Wein
Shemot**

The Torah does not describe for us in any form whatsoever as to what happened to the family of Yaakov - who are now the people of Israel, and suddenly very numerous and at one time very influential and comfortable in Egyptian society - in the years between the death of Yosef and the enslavement of the Jews many decades later.

The Torah is not here to give us a narrative of interesting historical facts and, as it did in the book of Bereshith, it skips over decades and even centuries without giving us any in-depth description. But Midrash does attempt to somehow fill that void and portrays for us on one hand a people who attempted to remain separate and unique from the Egyptian majority culture by its dress, language and historical memory and yet on the other hand succumbed to adopting Egyptian gods and beliefs.

The Egyptian exile was the prototype for all later exiles. It posed the challenge of how to remain steadfastly Jewish while living under foreign rule and enmeshed in a foreign, even alien, culture and belief system. This has remained the major challenge of Jewish existence throughout the ages. This challenge accounts for the relative paucity of the number of Jews in the world and for the continuing pressures - anti-Semitic and otherwise - that constantly threaten to erode Jewish identity and even existence.

Every place of Jewish exile in the Diaspora has faced this challenge. Some localities have fared better than others in coping with it. Though the challenge has remained constant, the responses to it have varied from place to place. Apparently what may have worked successfully for one society and time may not be the correct solution for another.

It is important to note that the redemption from Egyptian exile was facilitated by Heaven through unlikely means and by a surprising champion of Israel's cause. The likely choice for becoming the redeemer of Israel from Egyptian bondage was certainly Aharon. He was present with the Jews during the darkest years of persecution and was recognized by the people as its leading personality. He led the tribe of Levi, the tribe of scholars of Yaakov's Torah and the bearers and teachers of his tradition.

His brother Moshe, who disappears from the scene of Jewish suffering in Egypt for approximately sixty years, was raised in the palace of the hated Pharaoh and does not appear to be especially articulate in speech. As a shepherd, he engages in an occupation reviled by the dominant Egyptian society and culture. Yet it is Moshe who is the redeemer, the lawgiver, and the greatest of all prophets that the world will ever know.

It is Moshe who will teach Israel the Torah, which alone will be the necessary guarantee for Jewish survival and growth in all of the societies in which it will find itself to be part of. God's guidance and protection of Israel lies in providing the Jewish people with proper, even if unlikely, leadership to meet the challenges constantly imposed on a small people by varying times and place.

Shabat shalom

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**Ohr Somayach :: Torah Weekly :: Parshat Shmot
For the week ending 21 December 2013 / 18 Tevet 5774**

**by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair - www.seasonsofthemoon.com
Insights**

An Offer You Can't Refuse

"And there arose a new king over Egypt" (1:8)

Rabbi Leib Chasman was the mashgiach (spiritual mentor) of the Chevron Yeshiva in the 1930s. A certain problem faced the Yeshiva and it was decided that the issue should be decided in a general meeting of all the rabbis. One of the speakers, a venerable man in his late eighties, rose to the podium. His advanced years and fragility necessitated the help of two of the younger rabbis. Finally, he cleared his throat and began to speak. "My esteemed and honored colleagues, hear my words! My body is weak and old. The natural desires of youth no longer affect my judgment. Nothing clouds my judgment any longer. All life's temptations have no taste for me anymore. Hear my words and be guided by me!"

Rabbi Chasman jumped to his feet and pounded the table. "Not true. All desires may wane with age except one, and that gets stronger and stronger — the attraction to status and honor."

Our internal negative impulse is an opportunist. He's always looking for an opening. When one door closes on him, he pushes even harder to get in the other.

"And there arose a new king over Egypt."

The people of Egypt came to Pharaoh after Yosef's death to organize themselves against the Jews. Pharaoh wouldn't hear of it. "We only live because of them. How can we turn on them?" Their reaction was to depose Pharaoh. He became a mere commoner, no longer enjoying the position of king and the honor that goes with it. After cooling his heels for three months he suddenly saw the light. He did a 180 degree about-face and embraced the will of the people. Thus the Torah writes, "And there arose" — meaning that the former Pharaoh "arose" from his deposed position.

Such is the power of status. Our deepest convictions can be held to ransom by an offer we can't refuse.

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Rabbi Weinreb's Parsha Column, Parshat Shemot

Sponsored in memory of Nathan and Louise Schwartz a"h

"Reading the Footnotes"

I often find myself disagreeing with the phrase, "It's just a footnote in history". I have found some of the most interesting and important facts buried, unseen by most people, in the footnotes of the books I read.

Recently, I have begun to use a pocket-sized edition of the Talmud in my daily study. I have been doing a lot of traveling lately, and this miniature edition suits me well.

I find that the print of the main text and major commentaries in this edition is in sharp focus and, although quite small, is perfectly legible. However, this edition, known as Oz V'Hadar, contains an innovative feature. In the margins of every page are footnotes in very fine print, indicating variant readings of the traditional text. These footnotes supply minor corrections based upon ancient manuscripts or early print editions of the Talmud.

These footnotes are so small that I can hardly make them out, even with my glasses. I resort to the use of a magnifying glass, which enlarges the size of the letters by four or five times. In one corner of the glass is a small circle with an even more powerful magnifier, which enlarges the size of the letters to ten or perhaps twelve times their size.

I find these footnotes extremely useful in my study. Invariably, they suggest changes to the text that seem minor but are not at all trivial. Passages in the Talmud that I previously found vague or puzzling are elucidated with the change of a word, or sometimes even the addition of one single letter.

Often, I am tempted to ignore these footnotes, passing up the opportunity to use the magnifier. But when I do so, I forfeit the opportunity of gaining surprising and edifying insights.

These marginal footnotes, together with this magnifier, have literally opened my eyes to the authentic meaning of the text and have given me a fresh understanding of passages that I had previously found challenging.

In this week's Torah portion, Parshat Shemot (Exodus 1:1-6:1), we encounter a phrase in Rashi's commentary that my experience with the footnotes and the magnifying glass has helped me appreciate anew.

The Bible has just concluded the account of baby Moses' rescue by Pharaoh's daughter. It is about to proceed to narrate the story of the mature Moses. It begins, "Sometime after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and he saw their labors" (Exodus 2:11).

Rashi comments, "He saw their labors: He directed [literally, 'gave'] his eyes and heart, to feel troubled for them." Rashi's comment is prompted by the words "he saw." Of course, if he went out to his brethren, he "saw" their labors.

Rashi, therefore, suggests an alternative and deeper interpretation of the words "he saw." He is telling us that he didn't merely see visually. He saw deeply. He took notice. Metaphorically, he used his "magnifying glass" to discover every footnote, to absorb every detail of his brethren's toil. What he saw troubled him, and he suffered along with them.

The Midrash, serving as our "magnifying glass," provides an expanded picture of every "footnote" in the scene that Moses saw:

He saw their labors, and he wept, saying, "Woe is me, I am willing to die for them." He extended his shoulders to help carry the burden of each and every one of them. He saw the weak carrying heavy burdens, and the strong carrying lighter ones. He saw manly burdens being carried by women, and feminine burdens carried by men. He saw tasks appropriate for the elderly assigned to the young, and tasks befitting the young passed along to the elderly. He put aside his royal equipage and eased their labors... So that the Holy One Blessed be He said to him, "You left behind your concerns, went to observe Israel's pain, and reacted like a good brother. So too will I, God, leave behind My upper and lower celestial spheres and speak to you..."

The Midrash's implication that the Almighty, so to speak, took his cue from Moses is a daring one. But even more daring from a theological perspective is Rashi's comment on a later phrase in the parsha: "God looked upon the Israelites, and God knew."

What can "and God knew" possibly mean? After all, He is all-knowing, omniscient.

Targum Onkeles, troubled by this question, renders the phrase "God knew" into Aramaic as, "and God gave His word that He would redeem them."

A widely-used English translation renders the phrase, "and God took notice of them."

Rashi offers a theologically daring comment: "He directed [literally, 'gave'] His heart toward them and did not hide His eyes."

Returning to the metaphor I introduced above, God, so to speak, used His divine magnifying glass to scrutinize every footnote, to attend to every detail, of Israel's enslavement.

Rashi dares to apply the same terms that he used to describe Moses' empathic response, "eyes" and "heart," to the Almighty Himself. Rashi leaves his readers with an image of a God who demonstrates human-like sympathy for His suffering people.

There is much more to these two passages in Rashi's commentary than an account of Moses' compassion. There is more to them than just a glimpse of God's merciful ways. There is a lesson here for all of us.

We often "see" our brothers in difficulties of one sort or another. Typically, matters stop right there. We "see" them, but we do not extend ourselves in the ways that Moses did. Quite the contrary: we tend to look away.

But there is another, much more worthy option. We can utilize our magnifying glass to look at the footnotes. We can pay careful attention to the plight of our brothers, noting all the details of their plight. We can direct our eyes to the scene that is before us and can then open our hearts so that they feel the pain of others who suffer.

Finally, like Moses, we can shed our inhibitions and plunge right into the fray, extending our shoulders to help bear our brother's burden.

Moses is called Moshe Rabbenu, Moses our Teacher. As we read the weekly portions for the next many months, we will learn many things from him. But this week, we can learn from his very first lesson, one that

he modeled by his own conduct: Direct your eyes and your heart to your brother's suffering.

www.matzav.com or www.torah.org/learning/drasha
Parsha Parables By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Drasha Parshas Shemos
by Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

Tough Love

Moshe, the humblest man who was ever on the face of this earth, the man who consistently pleaded with Hashem to spare the Jewish nation from his wrath, emerges this week for the very first time.

First impressions are almost always last impressions, so I wondered what are Moshe's first actions? Surely they would typify his future distinction. Open a Chumash and explore the young lad who is found on the Nile, spends his youth in Pharaoh's palace, and finally "goes out amongst his brothers." He sees an Egyptian smiting a Jew and then, in a non-speaking role (at least without speaking to any human), he kills him. That is Moshe's foray in communal activism. His first words seem diametrically opposed to his ensuing persona. The next day, Moshe "went out and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting." He immediately chastised the wicked one, "Why would you strike your fellow?" (Exodus 2:13). His admonition provokes an angry response from the quarrelers. "Who appointed you as a dignitary, a ruler, and a judge over us? Do you propose to murder me, as you murdered the Egyptian?" (ibid. v. 4). Moshe's hallmark compassion and concern seems to be overshadowed by his forceful admonition. Is that the first impression the Torah wants us to have of Moshe?

In his youth, Reb Zorach Braverman, who later was known as a brilliant Jerusalem scholar, once travelled from Eishishok to Vilna, Lithuania. Sitting next to him was an elderly Jew with whom he began to converse. Reb Zorach commented to the old man that it was sad that in a city as large as Vilna there was no organized Torah youth group.

The old man became agitated. In a tear-stained voice he responded, "Whom do you expect to organize these groups, "he asked incredulously, " the communal leaders who are destroying Judaism in Vilna? They do nothing to promote Torah values!" The man went on to condemn a group of parnasim who had assumed control of the community affairs and constantly overruled the Rabbinical authorities in every aspect of communal life as it related to observance of Jewish law. Reb Zorach became incensed. Who was this man to deride a group of community elders? He responded vociferously. "Excuse me," he interrupted, " but I think you should study the new sefer (book) that was just published. It is called Chofetz Chaim and deals specifically with the laws of slander and gossip. It details all the transgressions listed in the Torah for gossip as such! In fact, I have it here with me."

The old man asked to see the book. He took it and immediately opened it to a section which specified the rare instance it was a mitzvah to speak out against a group of people, in the case when they act defiantly against rabbinic authority. Reb Zorach remained quiet and silently took back the book. The trip ended and the old man and Reb Zorach went their ways in Vilna. It only took a day until Reb Zorach found out that he was seated next to none other than the Chofetz Chaim himself.

Of course, Moshe was the compassionate advocate for Klal Yisrael. But the Torah chooses to define his leadership in a clear and unambiguous manner in strong and controversial encounters. His first act was to kill an Egyptian who was smiting a Jew, and his second was to chastise two Jews who were fighting so strongly that they threatened to report his former act to the Egyptian authorities. After the Torah establishes an ability to reprove and even rebuke sin, only then does it tell us of Moshe's compassion in protecting the daughters of Yisro, in tending sheep by running after a tiny lamb who lost its way in the scorching dessert.

Often I hear quotes, "if Rav Moshe were alive today," or "if the Chofetz Chaim were alive today," followed by a notion that these beloved, departed, sages, with their celebrated love and compassion for all Jews, would surely ascribe to unmitigated love and acceptance of anyone's notion of Judaism as an acceptable alternative.

It's just not true. Great leaders and Torah visionaries do have tremendous love for all Jews, but they do not compromise on Torah law or on Torah values. They are vociferous advocates of right versus wrong. Though one minute they may be chasing lost sheep, running after a small child who dropped a small coin, or translating a letter for an indigent immigrant, they would not hesitate to strike the Egyptian and chastise their fellow Jew who raised his hand against another, physically or spiritually. What truly makes a great man is not only knowing how and when to hold them, but also knowing how and when to scold them.

Dedicated in memory of David Kramer by Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Kramer

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Rabbi Yissocher Frand - Parshas Shemos

The Torah's Standard of "Hakaras HaTov" [Gratitude]

Yisro's daughters arrived home early after Moshe Rabbeinu rescued them and watered their cattle. The Torah describes the scene: "And they came to Reuel their father and he said, why have you come home early today? And they said 'An Egyptian saved us from the hands of the shepherds and he also drew the water for us and watered the sheep'." [Shmos 2:18-19]

An amazing teaching of Chazal gives insight into showing gratitude from a Torah perspective. The Medrash cites the analogy of someone who was bitten by a certain serpent, who then went down to the river to wash his wound. At the water, he saw a child drowning and rescued him. The child later told him, "If not for you, I would be dead." The rescuer corrected him: "It was not I who saved you but the serpent that bit me. If not for him, I would have had no need to run down to the river and discover that you were in danger."

The Medrash uses this example to explain the dialog between Yisro's daughters and Mo she. When they thanked Moshe for saving them from the shepherds, Moshe said "It was not I who saved you. It was the Egyptian man I killed, which ultimately caused me to flee Egypt. Had it not been for him, I would not have come along here to see your plight." That is why they told their father "An Egyptian man saved us from the hands of the shepherds."

This insight is an example of "Without Torah there is no derech erez (etiquette)." [Pirkei Avos 3:17] Every society has a concept of "Hakaras HaTov" – a person must show appreciation. However, we see here how far the concept of "Hakaras HaTov" goes. The Torah extends it all the way back to the Egyptian man who was the indirect cause of Moshe's having to flee Egypt.

The reason for such seemingly far-fetched linkage is our belief in the concept of Hasgocha Pratis [personal Divine Providence]. If the Almighty arranges that a certain person should receive a favor in a certain fashion, it is because it is all part of His "Grand Plan". As part of the "Grand Plan" that Yisro's daughters should be rescued from the shepherds by Moshe, there had to be the prior story involving the Egyptian man. This is the extent of the idea of "Hakaras HaTov" in the Torah's eyes.

An example of a great person's Hakaras HaTov is evident in the following story:

There was once a young man who learned in the Chevron Yeshiva, who was accustomed to come to the Mirer Yeshiva to hear the mussar talks of Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz. When the young man became engaged to get married, as a courtesy, he sent an invitation to Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz to come to his wedding. The young man did not really expect Rav Chaim to come as he was not really a student of the Mirer Yeshiva, he only sat in on the mussar talks of the Rosh Yeshiva.

But Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz did indeed come to the wedding. The groom told the person making the announcements that they must give Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz an honor (e.g. – reciting one of the Sheva Brochos under the Chupa) as was befitting the Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirer Yeshiva. Rav Chaim sensed what was happening and he told the student, "If you give me an honor I am going to walk out." However, the

groom felt that there was no way he could not give the Mirer Rosh Yeshiva an honor and he did so. And Rav Chaim did in fact walk out of the wedding hall.

After the wedding, the groom asked Rav Chaim why he decided to come to the wedding altogether (for a young man who was not enrolled as a student of his yeshiva) and why he refused to accept the honor he was given. Rav Chaim told him that every time he saw that this student made a special effort to come from the Chevron Yeshiva to the Mirer to hear his lectures, it gave him added incentive to give a powerful "mussar schmooze". He felt that he had added Divine Assistance (S'yata d'shmaya) because he saw how much his lectures were appreciated. Thus, he came strictly for Hakaras HaTov to the young man, not to get any kind of honor. That is why he walked out when they tried to honor him for coming.

Modesty Is Key Criteria of Jewish Leadership

Moshe Rabbeinu and the Almighty engaged in an extended dialog regarding whether Moshe is the proper person to take the Jewish nation out of Egypt. Rashi explains that this dialogue went on for seven days with Moshe resisting and the Almighty insisting that he take the mission. Moshe argued "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Israel out of Egypt? G-d responded, "I will be with you and this is the sign that I have sent you: When you take the nation out of Egypt, you will worship the L-rd on this mountain." [Shmos 3:11-12]

This is a difficult pasuk to translate, even at the level of simple interpretation of Scripture (p'shuto shel mikra). What kind of sign would the fact that they will worship G-d on that mountain be for Moshe? Moshe was looking for a sign at present that he was the appropriate person for the job. G-d responded with a seemingly unrelated detail that would not happen until a future time.

The Me shech Chochmah explains that the biggest proof that Moshe was the right man for the job is because he said "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" It was precisely Moshe's attribute of extreme modesty that qualified him to be the leader of the Jewish people.

Today we speak of different qualities that a person must have in order to be a leader: He is a good communicator, he is a good organizer, he is very bright, he is good at delegating authority, etc., ...all the lists that people speak of when they enumerate the qualities of good leaders in the secular world. We see from this pasuk that in "our world" the biggest factor that Moshe had going for himself was that he felt "Who am I to go before Pharaoh?"

The Meshech Chochmah explains the continuity of the pasukim with this idea. The Almighty despises people who are haughty and He loves people who are humble. "This is the sign..." means "You know why I chose you? It is for the same reason I chose this mountain (Mt. Sinai)." There is a famous Medrash that all the great mountains wanted to be the peak on which the Torah was given. Har Sinai did not say anything in the campaign to become the site of Revelation. The Medrash emphasizes that Har Sinai is not such a high mountain and that is the reason the Almighty chose it. It is because the Almighty appreciates humility and abhors haughtiness.

Rav Tzvi Pessach Frank had been a Dayan [Judge] in the Beis Din of the Edah HaCharedis of Jerusalem since 1907. When the post of "Rabbah shel Yerushalayim" became vacant (in the 1930s or 40s), a delegation came to Rav Tzvi Pessach and began telling him all the issues and problems that faced the Jews of Yerushalayim at the time. They made no mention that they were there to offer him the job. They just enumerated the problems. After sitting through the meeting for an hour or so, listening to all the problems he told the delegation "I know the problems already. Why are you telling me all this?" At that point they told him "We want you to become the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem." He reacted with surprise, "Why are you coming to me?" The delegation responded, "We

are looking for a person who when offered the job asks 'Why are you coming to me?'" This is the criteria that makes you fit to be the leader of the Jews of Yerushalayim!

The same was true of Moshe Rabbeinu. Among all his other attributes the criteria that made him most fit to be the leader of the Jewish people was the great modesty that prompted him to react "Who am I that I should go before Pharaoh?" This is something the Almighty admires. Leadership of the Jewish people is invested with a tremendous amount of power. As we know, power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely. When choosing a leader – if one wants to make sure that he does not abuse his power – the key is that the person should be humble. This is what distinguished Moshe Rabbeinu from all other people on the face of the earth.

This is precisely what the Almighty told him. The proof that you are the leader is that you say "Who am I that I should go before Pharaoh?" This is the very same reason that G-d chose Mt. Sinai to be the place where the people will in the future serve Him upon that mountain – Mount Sinai too was the humblest of all the mountains.

Transcribed by David Twersky Seattle, WA; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD

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Rabbi Shmuel Rabinowitz

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Parshat Shmot: How did anti-Semitism begin?

By Shmuel Rabinowitz

How did the nation's status deteriorate from a successful and well-connected community to that of lowly, humiliated slaves?

This week, we will begin reading from the second of the five books of the Torah, Shmot, or Exodus. This book deals with Am Yisrael's time of exile in Egypt, its wondrous and super-natural Exodus, the revelation at Mount Sinai at which the Torah was given to Am Yisrael, and the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle) – the temporary "temple" which accompanied Am Yisrael for centuries until the Temple was built in its permanent site in Jerusalem.

At the end of the previous book, Genesis, we left Am Yisrael as it was developing gloriously in Egypt.

The small Jewish community that descended into Egypt lived in a special area termed the Land of Goshen," depended on respectable ties in the Egyptian royal palace, and faithfully maintained the traditions of the three patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'acov.

On the other hand, at the beginning of Exodus, we read about a terribly depressed period in which our ancestors were worked to the bone, and suffered from abuse at the hands of the corrupt Egyptian nation. The lowest point was with pharaoh's decree to throw every Jewish baby boy into the Nile River immediately upon birth, thus annihilating the Jewish nation. This plot, as we all know, did not succeed.

How did the nation's status deteriorate from a successful and well-connected community to that of lowly, humiliated slaves? To understand this, we must find the secret of the Jewish nation's success in Egypt during this first period, and try to see how the nation lost its unique status in Egypt.

Ancient Egypt was a corrupt pagan center, a land where pagan worship affected the entire nation, beginning with the king and until the last of the nation. Then Ya'acov's family came to this ignoble culture carrying the flag of belief in one G-d, the ideological path Avraham Avinu had paved of kindness, charity and justice. Our sages tell us that when Ya'acov and his family arrived in Egypt, they were concerned about assimilation, so they took upon themselves not to change three things: their names, their language and their manner of dress. Ya'acov's family living in Egypt was unique in its Hebraic names and language, and their special, modest, respectable and restrained clothing.

These three traditions saved the nation from assimilating into the Egyptian nation, and worse – into the corrupt and pagan Egyptian culture. But this unique family did not manage to maintain its values for long. The Torah tells us this: "Now Joseph died, as well as all his brothers and all that generation. The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very, very strong, and the land became filled with them.

(Exodus 1:6-7) Immediately upon the death of the first generation of the Jewish community in Egypt, the process of integration into Egyptian culture began, with

the symbol of this integration being the phrase "and the land became filled with them." The nation began to go out to the Egyptian expanses, began to get to know the Egyptian nation, its beliefs and lifestyle.

The Egyptian response quickly followed: "So they appointed over them tax collectors to afflict them with their burdens... So the Egyptians enslaved the children of Israel with back-breaking labor." (Exodus 1:11-13) The response to integration into Egyptian society was, seemingly, contrary to logic. Usually people tend to express hatred to those who are different and apart from them, but here there was the opposite process. When Am Yisrael preserved its uniqueness, it was treated with respect and appreciation, but when the nation started to fall apart and lose its values, anti-Semitism reared its head.

Contrary to what we sometimes think, history teaches us the opposite. The more the Jewish nation preserves its values, believes in the righteousness of its path, and is proud of its faith and Torah, the more it merits respect, appreciation and even admiration.

However, when the Jewish nation stoops down, when we feel that our ancient Jewish culture is not advanced enough and that we must take upon ourselves the lifestyle of other nations, that's when we discover that the world is not interested in us, that the nations of the world do not defend us, and that the respect turns to disdain and even hatred.

An incisive Jewish saying expresses this message: "When the Jew doesn't do kiddush, the Gentile does havdala." Meaning, when the Jew does not maintain his uniqueness and holiness, the Gentile reminds him of this through latent or manifest anti-Semitism, and makes sure to differentiate and distance him from the international community.

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Rav Kook List

Rav Kook on the Torah Portion

Shemot: Going To Peace

After agreeing to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses took leave of his father-in-law. Jethro blessed Moses "Go in peace" (Ex. 4:18). Actually, Jethro said "Go to peace." The Talmud (Berachot 64a) picks up on this fine nuance:

"One who takes leave from his friend should not say 'Go in peace' ('lech BE-shalom'), but 'Go to peace' ('lech LE-shalom')."

Jethro told Moses, 'Go to peace' - Moses went and succeeded in his mission. David told his son Absalom, 'Go in peace' - Absalom went and was hanged.

When taking leave of the deceased, however, one should say, 'Go in peace.'"

What is the difference between these two salutations? Why is one appropriate for the living, and the second for the dead?

Ready for the Journey

Life is full of struggles, both spiritual and physical. We are not doing our acquaintances a favor by pretending these battles do not exist. Implying that the road is easy will only lower their guard, lessening their preparation for the obstacles that lie in the way towards their ultimate destination.

Therefore, we should warn our friends at the start of their journey: know that peace and tranquility are far from us. There are many who strive against us, and there are many obstacles on the way that must be overcome. We tell our friends "Go to peace." Proceed towards your destination, but do not expect that the path itself will be peaceful and easy. The road is full of impediments; only by overcoming them, will you reach peace and completeness.

Of course, the story is much different for souls who have already completed their journey on earth. Their material struggles are over, and these obstacles no longer exist. The soul may continue to grow in that world too, but the path is a tranquil one. Therefore, we take leave from the dead by saying, "Go in peace."

With these two salutations, the Sages contrasted the nature of this world and the next. The physical world is replete with struggles and challenges which we must be prepared to face. The World to Come, on the other hand, is one of rest and peace, which we need not fear.

(Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 106-107. Adapted from Ein Eyah vol. II, p. 396)
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subject: Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum

Peninim on the Torah by Rabbi A. Leib Scheinbaum Parshas Shemos

Hashem was good to the midwives, and the people increased and became very mighty. (1:20)

The meyaldos halvrios, Hebrew midwives, really extended themselves to save the Jewish children, but is that not what being Jewish means? These women stood up to Pharaoh's evil decree, with great risk to their own lives; thus, they were able to save countless Jewish children. The pasuk's syntax, however, seems out of order. It begins, "Hashem was good to the midwives, and the people increased and became very mighty. Because the midwives feared Hashem, He gave them houses." Rashi explains the meaning of this "good" which Hashem gave the midwives as the Houses of Priesthood that they would be of the Leviim and of Malchus, royalty. In other words, these women did not receive real estate in return for sacrificing their lives. They became the progenitors of the Houses of Kehunah, Leviah and Malchus, which is an appropriate "return" on their "investment." The problem is that, in order to explain the term, "Hashem was good [to the midwives], Rashi skips over to the next pasuk and explains that the "good" refers to these Houses. In order to do this, he includes the pasuk, "And the people increased and became very mighty," which has little to do with the "good" Hashem did to benefit the midwives.

According to Rashi, Hashem's "good," a reference to the houses that He gave them, is interrupted by the statement noting the nation's physical increase in numbers. Would it not have been simpler just to say that Hashem gave the women houses as their reward, immediately after stating that He was good to them? Then, after connecting the "good" and the "houses," the Torah could write that the nation had increased.

In his Einei Yisrael, Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita, quotes his father, Reb Berel Belsky, zl, a talmid, student, of the Chafetz Chaim, who suggested a fascinating explanation, which I feel is especially practical and characteristic to him. He explained that, throughout the ages, many Jews have performed numerous acts of lovingkindness with selflessness and mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, solely for the purpose of executing Hashem's will. Hashem is surely good to them, rewarding them well. A number of mitzvos incur wonderful reward in Olam Habba, the World to Come.

What about reward in this world? It is rare for someone to be fortunate enough to witness the fruits of his labor materializing in full force before his eyes. To observe the full impact of one's own benevolence, to be a part of the lives of those whom he has set on the true path to religious observance, is a reward that is both inspirational and encouraging. More often than not, one endeavors and helps those who are in material and spiritual need, but the fruits are reaped much later. He may have to leave this world before his endeavors become successful.

Occasionally, individuals partake from both "tables," who merit to see the results of their endeavors, both in this world and in the next. This was precisely the blessing received by the meyaldos. They risked their lives to save the Jewish children, and they lived long enough to see their work bloom, as Klal Yisrael turned into a strong, mighty nation. This is what the Torah means when it says, "G-d was good to the midwives, and the people increased and became very mighty." An inherent part of the "good" which Hashem granted the midwives was allowing them to see all those babies whom they had saved become the backbone of the mighty nation - Klal Yisrael. They lived to experience tremendous nachas, satisfaction, by witnessing the incredible growth of the Jewish nation - all as a result of their self-sacrifice.

And Moshe 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. (2:11)

Rashi's famous comment tells it all: Nassan einav v'libo libeyos meitzar aleihem, "He applied his eyes and heart (to see their suffering and) grieve with them." The Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita, observes that Hashem has given us a mitzvah to protect our eyes from gazing at anything that will cause us spiritual harm. V'lo sassuru acharei levavchem v'acharei eineichem, "And (do) not explore after your heart and after your eyes" (Bamidbar 15:39). To explore with our eyes can be quite dangerous to our spiritual health. This is why we are admonished concerning shemiras ha'ainayim, guarding/ protecting our eyes from those areas which increase our base physical passions, causing us to stray. On the other hand, elsewhere, we are commanded not to look away, Lo suchal l'hisaleim, "You shall not hide yourself" (Devarim 22:3). One may not look away and ignore a lost article belonging to a Jew. We must stop, pick it up and return it. We have a responsibility to all Jews. Turning away our eyes does not change the fact that someone is in need. Averting our gaze will not make the need disappear.

from: Shema Yisrael Torah Network <shemalist@shemayisrael.com>

Moshe Rabbeinu taught us that a Jew does not divert his visual awareness of another Jew's pain. It begins, va'yaar, "and he observed." If one does not look, he remains unaware. Indifference to another Jew's plight begins with a refusal to see, to observe his pain. One cannot be sensitive to what he does not see. One does not have to turn his head away intentionally, nor maliciously refuse to look at a situation. He just seems to discover new areas of frumkeit, religious observance, to occupy his mind, so that he is able to justify his indifference and insensitivity to others.

In the Talmud Sotah 21b, Chazal decry the chasid shoteh, pious fool, who refuses to pull a woman out of the water, thereby allowing her to drown. His claim that he does not look at women earns him his well-deserved appellation. The Talmud also addresses the fellow who shuts his eyes to avoid looking at women. This causes him to bloody himself as he walks into a wall.

Moshe did not allow himself this stigmatism. He looked when necessary, because he cared about his brothers. He was not looking for excuses, as so many do when they lack the fortitude to help another Jew in pain. Far be it from me to suggest that we are unsympathetic. It is just that it is easier to help when the adversity is of a conventional nature, such as illness, poverty and death. When the challenge is of a more exotic nature, such as reaching out to a Jew in trouble with the law, helping women or children who are victims of abuse, children at risk, women who are maliciously abandoned by their husbands, people tend to shy away and encourage "others" to help.

This double-standard is not innovative. It was already in vogue in Moshe's time. Moshe was certainly not the first person to behold a Jew being beaten by an Egyptian. He was the only one who stopped and took issue with it. What happened to everybody else? Where were all of the other Jews? Did they not see what Moshe saw? Horav Gamiliel Rabinowitz, Shlita, explains that it was no secret that Jews were being persecuted by the Egyptian aggressors. Moshe distinguished himself by the fact that he viewed each and every Jew as achiv, his brother. The Torah alludes to this when it writes, "And he saw an Egyptian striking a Hebrew man, of his brethren." One usually gets involved when family is suffering. I underscore "usually," because it is not always true. Some people turn their backs even on close family. It may not be the norm, but, sadly, it is true.

Vayeitzei el echav, "And (he) went out to his brethren." The reason Moshe left the comfort and isolation of the royal palace was that his brethren were suffering. He felt a brotherly kinship to them which inspired him to help them. When we turn our collective backs on a fellow Jew or Jewess, we must remember that he is our brother; she is our sister. If we continue ignoring them - the problem is with us - not them. We have lost our kinship with the Jewish People. We should view Jewish issues as family issues, Jewish problems as family problems. We must open up our eyes - not close them, hoping the problem will go away. Sadly, it does not go away until someone with courage and sensitivity becomes involved.

Moshe replied to Hashem... I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, not since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to your servant. (4:10)

Rashi notes that this was the seventh day of Moshe Rabbeinu's dialogue with Hashem. Moshe's reluctance to assume the leadership of Klal Yisrael was because he did not want to arrogate himself over his older brother, Aharon, who was a Navi, Prophet, and the present leader of the people. The Yalkut Shimoni quotes Moshe, "Until I stood here, my brother, Aharon, had been prophesizing for the last eighty years. Now I should come into his perimeter? I should be his adversary and cause him pain?" Hashem replied, "You will neither be his adversary, nor will you cause him pain. Indeed, Aharon will be overjoyed with your acceptance."

Chazal teach us that Moshe was concerned about Aharon's feelings. Indeed, if Hashem would not have assuaged his concerns, telling him that Aharon was in agreement, Moshe would not have accepted the nation's leadership - and he would have been justified! This is mind-boggling! An entire nation is enslaved. Hashem "asks" Moshe to take the reins of leadership, to play a role in the people's liberation, and Moshe politely refuses, because he does not want to hurt his older brother's feelings - and he is warranted in doing so! This teaches us the overriding significance of another Jew's feelings. Halachah demands that we be cognizant of our fellow's feelings. We may do nothing to impinge on another person's sensitivities. This applies even if we are in the course of executing a mitzvah - even one as lofty as saving the Jewish nation from bondage! Is this reasonable? Should one Jew's feelings dominate over a mitzvah, over saving the Jewish nation?

While there is no question that a Jew's emotions play a critical role in whatever endeavor he undertakes, it is the halachah that cannot be accommodated, repeated in any way. Halachah is the foundation of our People. It is the very discipline that maintains our commitment to Hashem. Halachah does not brook any compromise. To undermine halachah is to impugn the integrity of our relationship with Hashem. In his commentary to the pasuk (in Bircas Yaakov, the blessings of Yaakov Avinu,

prior to his death), Lo yassar shevet miYehudah, "The scepter shall not depart from Yehudah" (Bereishis 49:10), Ramban writes: "This blessing grants monarchy over the Jewish nation to the tribe of Yehudah - under all circumstances. No one is to infringe upon their leadership." He observes: "This was the reason for the punishment of the Chashmonaim who ruled during the Second Temple. Despite their righteousness, and the fact that without them Torah would have been forgotten from the Jewish People, they were punished." The monarchy must remain in the hands of Shevet Yehudah.

Clearly, these chasidei Elyon, exalted pious ones, acted l'shem Shomayim, for Heaven's sake. They had no ulterior motives. Apparently, if they undertook to lead, it was because there was no one else suitable for the position. What else should they have done? Nonetheless, they were punished. They transgressed a halachah. Monarchy belongs to Yehudah. They should have found another way to save the nation, rather than assuming its monarchy. Once again, we see that if the intended mitzvah impinges upon someone's sensitivities, if it does not consummately adhere to halachic standards, it is no longer a mitzvah. Does not the end, however, justify the means? Does not an entire nation's Torah study and mitzvah observance merit some leniency? The following Torah thought from the Brisker Rav, zl, cited by Sichah Naeh, as being cited by the Tolner Rebbe, Shlita, in Heimah Yanchuni, should give us deeper insight, as well as buttress the idea that a mitzvah must be carried out in its purest form without any taint - regardless of its nature or validity.

In the Talmud Bava Metzia 85b, Chazal relate that Eliyahu HaNavi would frequent the Mesivta of Rabbi. One Rosh Chodesh, Eliyahu arrived late. Rabbi asked, "What is the reason Master is late?" Eliyahu replied that he had been unusually preoccupied: "By the time I awoke Avraham [Avinu] (the state of death experienced by the righteous is considered as merely a slumber. Thus, if they are awakened, they must first wash their hands prior to praying. Obviously, this passage of Talmud is replete with esoteric meaning and implication) and washed his hands and prayed, and did the same for Yitzchak [Avinu] and Yaakov [Avinu], it was already late." Chazal explain that Eliyahu did not wake them all up at once, because if all three Patriarchs had prayed at once, their prayer would have had such efficacy that they would have caused Moshiach to come before his proper time. Rabbi then asked Eliyahu, "Is there anyone alive in this world whose prayer is as effective?" Eliyahu replied, "Yes, there are Rabbi Chiya and his sons." Rabbi decreed a fast, and he placed Rabbi Chiya and his sons before the Amud, Lectern. This is in following with the halachah that on a public fast day, three people are placed before the Amud. (This fast day was "arranged" by Rabbi as an excuse to bring Rabbi Chiya and his sons together in prayer.)

During Chazaras HaShatz, repetition of the Shemoneh Esrai, when Rabbi Chiya said Mashiv ha'ruach, "He makes the wind blow," a wind blew. When he said, Morid ha'geshem, "He brings down the rain" rain descended. As he was about to say Mechayeh ha'meisim, "He restores life to the dead," the world suddenly shook. Chazal continue that Heaven prevented Rabbi Chiya from going further. Tosfos questions the use of Rabbi Chiya as Shliach Tzibur, to lead the prayer service. It has been decided that one whose articulation of certain Hebrew words is deficient should not lead the service. Therefore, people who lived in Haifa or Bais Shaan, who did not distinguish between the sounds of an aleph and ayin were not sent up to be chazzan. If so, why was Rav Chiya permitted to lead the service? Apparently, he did not distinguish between the sounds of a hay and a ches. They reply that this applies only in the event that another chazzan is available to lead the service. If no one else can lead, we use whomever we can get. Rabbi Chiya was unique in that no one else had the ability to achieve his exalted level of prayer. He was in a league all by himself.

The Brisker Rav has difficulty with Tosfos' question. This was a one-time opportunity, unprecedented in history, to bring about the advent of the Final Redemption. Is this a time to concern ourselves if the chazzan properly pronounces the hay? This teaches us, explains the Brisker Rav, that if the action we are about to take does not absolutely one-hundred percent conform with halachah, it is not done - even if this means delaying the Final Redemption for thousands of years! Halachah may neither be pushed aside, nor belittled. It is our lifeline, our strongest sense of discipline, and our connection with the Divine.

In today's highly-technological society, concern for the feelings of our fellow is not at a premium. We move at a faster pace and have less time for face-to-face, person-to-person relationships. We say "good morning" to thirty people at one time via text, and we neither offer a smile, nor care to receive one in return. There was a time when people did concern themselves with the feelings of others. While this may sound cynical, it is not meant to be. It is, regrettably, the truth. I had the good fortune to read the following two inspirational stories in Rabbi Yisrael Besser's Warmed by the Fire. While the stories took place involving gedolei Yisrael, I think it was their attitude and concern for others that elevated their gadol status even more.

It was Purim evening in the Yeshivah Gedolah of Montreal. In anticipation of the many times that Haman's name would be publicly read from the Megillah, the bachurim, students, hid a tape recorder that made numerous strange noises in the ceiling. Each time the name of Haman was read, they would activate it, to the hilarious laughter of all the students. The Rosh Yeshivah, Horav Mordechai Weinberg, zl, was visibly upset. He halted the Megillah reading, concerned lest he miss hearing the reading of a word, and sought out the source of the strange noises. The Rosh Yeshivah's agitation continued, even after the Megillah reading had concluded. Later, someone asked him why he had been so anxious; after all, it had only been a joke. The Rosh Yeshivah's response teaches us volumes about his concern for a fellow Jew: "To you, perhaps it was a joke - a joke that would delay the reading of the Megillah. To Reb Mordche (an elderly mispallel, worshipper, in the yeshivah, who was also a Holocaust survivor), who does not allow himself to sit down in a bais ha'medrash and who has been fasting all day because it is Taanis Esther, Fast of Esther, it is not so funny. To him, your five minutes of laughter may not be so funny. To him, five minutes may be critical. And you wonder why I am upset!"

The second episode occurred concerning Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl, during one of his brilliant shiurim, lectures. Rav Shach's shiur was an experience to behold, as hundreds of students would sit there spellbound, while they observed the unfolding of the extraordinary gaon's thought process. His depth was without peer, the fruits of diligence, perseverance and sheer brilliance. One day, as the Rosh Yeshivah was giving the shiur, he paused in mid-sentence, as if trying to recall something. The room was still - not a sound was uttered - nobody moved. Rav Shach was thinking. He said, "I know that Rav Akiva Eiger discussed this issue someplace, but, for some reason, I cannot seem to pinpoint it. Is there anyone here who knows where Rav Akiva Eiger discusses this subject?"

Immediately, everyone began to speak. The most distinguished students all searched their minds, looking for the elusive commentary of Rav Akiva Eiger - which the Rosh Yeshivah did not know! There was no resolution. Suddenly, from the back row, a talmid, student, walked up to the lectern carrying in his hand a Teshuvah Rav Akiva Eiger, and, with great confidence, presented it to Rav Shach. Voila! The Rosh Yeshivah's eyes flashed with delight. "Reuven," albeit a good student, was not the most distinguished - but the smile that Rav Shach gave him was priceless. It elevated his esteem before the entire student body of Ponevez. "Reuven" returned to his seat in the back of the bais ha'medrash a changed person.

One student in the bais ha'medrash, Akiva, Reuven's chavrusa, study partner, had a deeper insight into what had just taken place. Apparently, Reuven had been seriously involved in a shidduch, matrimonial match, with a fine, young woman, and it had recently broken off. He had thought that he was getting engaged. She let him know otherwise. Reuven was devastated, sitting in his room for a few days following the breakup. Word reached the Rosh Yeshivah, whose concern for his students was legend. The Rosh Yeshiva carried the nation's ills on his shoulders, but it did not distract him from his self-imposed responsibility to his talmidim.

Rav Shach summoned Akiva to his office and asked him about Reuven's "progress" in getting over his mishap. Akiva explained that, while he was going to seder, his heart was not in it. He remained depressed, his self-esteem having taken a major hit. Rav Shach thought for a moment and said, Mir darfen em freilich machen, "We must gladden him."

The very next day, as Rav Shach was preparing to enter his office prior to the shiur, he once again summoned Akiva and asked him what they were learning that day. Akiva mentioned that they had come across an interesting commentary by Rav Akiva Eiger. Rav Shach stopped him, "Hold it right there. Perfect."

For days after Reuven pointed out the Rav Akiva Eiger to Rav Shach, students would pass him by with looks of admiration and perhaps a bit of envy. After all, how often does one have the opportunity to show the Rosh Yeshivah a commentary that had "slipped" his mind? We now have an idea regarding the extent of caring for another fellow's feelings.

l'ilui nishmas ha'isha ha'chashuva Rivka Tova Devora bas R' Chaim Yosef Meir a"h nifter 21 Teves 5760 t.n.tz.v.h. - from Menachem Shmuel and Roiza Devora Solomon - In memory of Mrs. Toby Salamon a"h