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Much Information

**Reb Yeruchem Levovitz Zt"l**  
**By Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein**

Parshas Shemos Too Much Information print

Go and assemble the elders of Israel, and say to them,  
"...I have surely remembered you, and what is being done  
to you in Egypt." [2]

Welcome news, to be sure. But perhaps a bit dramatic,  
and more than a bit premature? Given the state of mind of  
the people, why did this message come now, while the  
nation was still in the full grip of the shibud, before  
Moshe could provide any indication at all that anything  
had changed?

You could argue, with justification, that a show of  
emunah by the Bnei Yisrael was a necessary precursor to  
the geulah. (Chazal [3] point specifically to the verses,  
"And they will hearken to your voice," [4] and "The  
people believed" [5] as important contributions towards  
their redemption.) Yet, that confidence in Hashem could  
have awaited the beginning of the long process of the  
makos. Why was it necessary to tell them about a geulah  
that was still many months away?

Here is the explanation. The Torah makes it quite clear  
that the exodus from Egypt played an outside role in  
forging the emunah of our people. This is the reason why  
Hashem began the Aseres HaDibros with a reference to  
His redeeming us from slavery. It is the reason why  
remembering yetzias Mitzrayim returns again and again  
as an explicit element in so many of the mitzvos of the  
Torah. It is the reason why so many miracles and signs  
attended the redemption.

It is also a truism that Hashem does not grant anything to  
us without some kind of preparatory action on our part.  
To ready ourselves for an infusion of emunah, we had to  
act on its imminent arrival. It was necessary for us to hear  
about Hashem's pending intervention on our behalf, and  
for us to anticipate it, dwell on it, savor it in advance. The  
Yalkut mentioned above does not mean that we had to  
accept the news rather than scoff at it. It means that we  
had to delight in that news. We had to picture different  
scenarios of redemption in our minds in advance of any  
display on Hashem's part. We had to believe with  
intensity before we had anything to show for it.

We mean the same in our tefilah during the Yamim  
Noraim regarding the rest of the world. We request of  
Hashem, "Place your fear... upon all Your beings." We  
continue with, "And all Your creatures will come to fear  
you." It is easy to read the second phrase as a  
consequence of the first, but it would be an error. Rather,  
the tefilah is that all humans will begin to feel a sense of

awe and reverence for Hashem. If, and only if, that occurs, we can pray for the former phrase as well. As a consequence of the openness of humans to the fear of Hashem, he can place a fuller, more sophisticated sense of fear upon them.

We showed that first, loving, anticipatory emunah in His promise to us back in Mitzrayim, before the miracles occurred. And that is what led to the greatest display of Hashem and His abilities in the history of Man.

1 Based on Daas Torah of R. Yeruchem Levovitz, Shemos, pgs. 18-20 ↑ 2 Shemos 3:16 ↑ 3 Yalkut Shimoni, Hoshea 519 ↑ 4 Shemos 3:18 ↑ 5 Shemos 4:31 ↑  
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from: Shabbat Shalom  
<[shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org](mailto:shabbatshalom@ounetwork.org)> date: Dec 23, 2021, 8:33 PM

### **On Not Obeying Immoral Orders**

#### **Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l**

The opening chapters of Exodus plunge us into the midst of epic events. Almost at a stroke the Israelites are transformed from protected minority to slaves. Moses passes from prince of Egypt to Midianite shepherd to leader of the Israelites through a history-changing encounter at the Burning Bush. Yet it is one small, often overlooked episode that deserves to be seen as a turning-point in the history of humanity. Its heroines are two remarkable women, Shifra and Puah.

We do not know who they were. The Torah gives us no further information about them other than that they were midwives, instructed by Pharaoh: ‘When you are helping the Hebrew women during childbirth on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live’ (Ex. 1:16). The Hebrew description of the two women as *hameyaldot ha'ivriyot* is ambiguous. It could mean “the Hebrew midwives”; so most translations and commentaries read it. But it could equally mean, “the midwives to the Hebrews,” in which case they may have been Egyptian. That is how Josephus,[1] Abarbanel and Samuel David Luzzatto understand it, arguing that it is simply implausible to suppose that Hebrew women would have been party to an act of genocide against their own people.

What we do know, however, is that they refused to carry out the order:

“The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the King of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live” (Ex. 1:17).

This is the first recorded instance in history of civil disobedience: refusing to obey an order, given by the most powerful man in the most powerful empire of the ancient world, simply because it was immoral, unethical, inhuman.

The Torah suggests that they did so without fuss or drama. Summoned by Pharaoh to explain their behaviour, they simply replied: “Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive” (Ex. 1:19). To this, Pharaoh had no reply. The matter-of-factness of the entire incident reminds us of one of the most salient findings about the courage of those who saved Jewish lives during the Holocaust. They had little in common except for the fact that they saw nothing remarkable in what they did.[2] Often the mark of real moral heroes is that they do not see themselves as moral heroes. They do what they do because that is what a human being is supposed to do. That is probably the meaning of the statement that they “feared God.” It is the Torah’s generic description of those who have a moral sense.[3]

It took more than three thousand years for what the midwives did to become enshrined in international law. In 1946, the Nazi war criminals on trial at Nuremberg all offered the defence that they were merely obeying orders, given by a duly constituted and democratically elected government. Under the doctrine of national sovereignty every government has the right to issue its own laws and order its own affairs. It took a new legal concept, namely a ‘crime against humanity’, to establish the guilt of the architects and administrators of genocide.

The Nuremberg principle gave legal substance to what the midwives instinctively understood: that there are some orders that should not be obeyed, because they are immoral. Moral law transcends and may override the law of the state. As the Talmud puts it:

“If there is a conflict between the words of the Master [God] and the words of a disciple [a human being], the words of the Master must prevail” (Kiddushin 42b).

The Nuremberg trials were not the first occasion on which the story of the midwives had a significant impact

on history. Throughout the Middle Ages the Church, knowing that knowledge is power and therefore preferring to keep it exclusively in the hands of the priesthood, had forbidden vernacular translations of the Bible. In the course of the sixteenth century, three developments changed this irrevocably. First was the Reformation, with its maxim *Sola scriptura*, “By Scripture alone,” placing the Bible centre-stage in the religious life.

Second was the invention, in the mid-fifteenth century, of printing. Lutherans were convinced that this was Divine Providence. God had sent the printing press so that the doctrines of the Reformed church could be spread worldwide.

Third was the fact that some people, regardless of the ban, had translated the Bible anyway. John Wycliffe and his followers had done so in the fourteenth century, but the most influential rebel was William Tyndale whose translation of the New Testament, begun in 1525, became the first printed Bible in English. He paid for this with his life.

When Queen Mary I took the Church of England back to Catholicism, many English Protestants fled to Calvin’s Geneva, where they produced a new translation, based on Tyndale, called the Geneva Bible. Produced in a small, affordable edition, it was smuggled into England in large numbers. Able to read the Bible by themselves for the first time, people soon discovered that it was, as far as monarchy is concerned, a highly seditious document.

It tells of how God told Samuel that in seeking to appoint a King, the Israelites were rejecting Him as their only Sovereign. It describes graphically how the Prophets were unafraid to challenge Kings, which they did with the authority of God Himself. And it told the story of the midwives who refused to carry out Pharaoh’s order. On this, in a marginal note, the Geneva Bible endorses their refusal, criticising only the fact that, in explaining their behaviour, they told a lie. The note says, “Their disobedience herein was lawful, but their dissembling evil.”

King James understood clearly the dire implication of that one sentence. It meant that a King could be disobeyed on the authority of God Himself: a clear and categorical refutation of the idea of the Divine right of Kings.[4] Eventually, unable to stop the spread of Bibles in translation, King James decided to commission his

own version which appeared in 1611. But by then the damage had been done and the seeds of what became the English revolution had been planted. Throughout the seventeenth century, by far the most influential force in English politics was the Hebrew Bible as understood by the Puritans, and it was the Pilgrim Fathers who took this faith with them on their journey to what would eventually become the United States of America.

A century and a half later, it was the work of another English radical, Thomas Paine, that made a decisive impact on the American revolution. His pamphlet, *Common Sense*, was published in America in January 1776 and became an instant best seller, selling 100,000 copies almost immediately. Its impact was huge, and because of it he became known as “the father of the American Revolution.” Despite the fact that Paine was an atheist, the opening pages of *Common Sense*, justifying rebellion against a tyrannical King, are entirely based on citations from the Hebrew Bible. In the same spirit, that summer Benjamin Franklin drew, as his design for the Great Seal of America, a picture of the Egyptians (i.e. the English) drowning in the Red Sea (i.e. the Atlantic), with the caption, “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God.” Thomas Jefferson was so struck by the sentence that he recommended it to be used on the Great Seal of Virginia, and later incorporated it in his personal seal.

The story of the midwives belongs to a larger vision implicit throughout the Torah and Tanach as a whole: that right is sovereign over might, and that even God Himself can be called to account in the name of justice, as He expressly mandates Abraham to do. Sovereignty ultimately belongs to God, so any human act or order that transgresses the will of God is by that fact alone *ultra vires*. These revolutionary ideas are intrinsic to the biblical vision of politics and the use of power.

In the end, though, it was the courage of two remarkable women that created the precedent later taken up by the American writer Thoreau[5] in his classic essay *Civil Disobedience* (1849) that in turn inspired Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. in the twentieth century. Their story also ends with a lovely touch. The text says:

“So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. And because the midwives feared God, He gave them houses” (Ex. 1:20-21).

Luzzatto interpreted this last phrase to mean that He gave them families of their own. Often, he wrote, midwives are women who are unable to have children. In this case, God blessed Shifra and Puah by giving them children, as he had done for Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel.

This too is a not unimportant point. The closest Greek literature comes to the idea of civil disobedience is the story of Antigone who insisted on giving her brother Polynices a burial despite the fact that King Creon had refused to permit it, regarding him as a traitor to Thebes. Sophocles' Antigone is a tragedy: the heroine must die because of her loyalty to her brother and her disobedience to the King. By contrast, the Hebrew Bible is not a tragedy. In fact biblical Hebrew has no word meaning "tragedy" in the Greek sense. Good is rewarded, not punished, because the universe, God's work of art, is a world in which moral behaviour is blessed and evil, briefly in the ascendant, is ultimately defeated.

Shifra and Puah are two of the great heroines of world literature, the first to teach humanity the moral limits of power.

[1] Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, II.9.2.

[2] See James Q. Wilson, The Moral Sense, New York, Free Press, 1993, pp. 35-39, and the literature cited there.

[3] See, for example, Gen. 20:11.

[4] See Christopher Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution, London: Allen Lane, 1993.

[5] See Henry David Thoreau, Civil Disobedience, Boston: David R. Godine, 1969, first published in 1849.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks ztz"l was a global religious leader, philosopher, the author of more than 25 books, and the 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, please visit [www.rabbisacks.org](http://www.rabbisacks.org).

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from: **Rabbi Yissocher Frand** <ryfrand@torah.org> to: ravfrand@torah.org date: Dec 23, 2021, 11:43 AM subject: Rav Frand - Presenting the Names of an All-Star Lineup!

**Parshas Shemos Presenting the Names of an All-Star Lineup**

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1188 – Cho'shaid Be'keshayrim – Not Giving The Benefit of the Doubt. Good Shabbos!

The pasuk in the beginning of Sefer Shemos says: "And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each man came with his household." (Shemos 1:1) The Torah then proceeds to again list the names of the Shevatim. Rashi comments: "Even though we already heard the names of the twelve Tribes during their lifetime, the Torah repeats and lists them again after their death – to show us how dear they are to the Ribono shel Olam, for they are compared to the stars who are brought out and brought back in by count and by name, as it is written: 'He brings forth their legions by number, He calls to each of them by name.'" (Yeshaya 40:26)

This is incredible. There are billions of stars and they all seem the same to us. But to the Ribono shel Olam, each one is dear and special. When something is dear and special, you call it by its name. Similarly, Rashi here says that Klal Yisrael are like the Kochavim – they too are dear to the Almighty, and therefore he calls each of them by name.

I saw a comment from Rav Leib Bakst, z"l, (1915-2003). Why are the Kochavim so dear to the Almighty? Rav Bakst points out that the reason the Kochavim were created in the first place was to mollify the moon. The famous Rashi in Parshas Bereshis relates that originally the Ribono shel Olam created the sun and the moon to be of equal size, each with an independent source of light. The moon came to the Almighty with the complaint that "Two kings cannot share the same crown." The Almighty agreed with this argument and commanded the moon to reduce its size and forgo its independent power of illumination. Chazal say that to appease the feelings of the moon for this downgrade in stature, the Ribono shel Olam created all the stars in the universe to accompany the moon at night, and to make the moon feel better.

Rav Leib Bakst says "Something or someone that makes another person or thing feel better is dear to the Ribono shel Olam. The Almighty loves sensitivity and loves entities that make others feel better. That is why Klal Yisrael is comparable to the stars – because they also make people feel better."

I once heard al pi derush (homiletically) at an Ufroof: The Ramoh writes (Shulchan Aruch Even Ezer Siman 61) “There are those who suggest making the chuppah under the sky.” There is a minhag Yisrael that people should get married under the sky. That is why chuppahs are typically held outdoors or under the skylight of a building. The Ramoh adds that this is a fortuitous sign (Siman Tov) that their seed will be like the stars in Heaven.

The popular understanding of this Ramoh is that the symbolism of holding the chuppah under the stars is that it should be a segulah for having many children (“as numerous as the stars in Heaven”). This, no doubt, is the simple pshat of the Ramoh in Shulchan Aruch. But I once heard al pi derush that the symbolism is something else: Your children should be “like the stars” means your children should be the type of people who are sensitive to others and that go out of their way to appease others and make them feel better – as was the original purpose of the stars in Heaven, to make the moon feel better.

Consolation for Miscarriages and the Loss of Infants  
The pasuk says, “And a man went from the House of Levi and he married the daughter of Levi.” (Shemos 2:1) The Gemara says (Sotah 12) that after Pharaoh made the decree that every male Jewish child should be thrown into the Nile, Amram, who was the Gadol haDor, divorced his wife. He said “We toil in vain.” He felt, under these circumstances why would we want to bring more children into the world.

The Gemara relates that Amram’s daughter Miriam came to him and told him that his decree was more severe than that of Pharaoh. Pharaoh only decreed death to the males. Amram’s decree effectively stopped even females from being born. Furthermore, she told her father, Pharaoh’s decree only took effect in Olam HaZeh (This World), whereas Amram’s decree that no child be born was a decree that impacted not only Olam HaZeh, but also Olam HaBah (The World to Come). (Rashi explains: Since the child would not be born, his soul would never come into the Next World.)

There is a machlokes in Masechta Sanhedrin (110b) as to how old a child needs to be before being eligible to enter Olam HaBah. Rav Chiya and Rav Shimon bar Rebbi argue as to whether it is from the moment of birth or from the moment the child learns to speak. However, the Gemara there has a third opinion – Ravina says it is from the moment of conception. Rav Moshe Feinstein writes in

a Teshuva in Yoreh De’ah (III:138) that we pasken like Ravina.

Lo Aleinu, sometimes women miscarry and the child they are pregnant with never comes into this world. It is a very emotional and tragic situation when a woman carries a baby for several months and the pregnancy does not come to fruition. People need to realize, however, that it is not “totally for naught that we struggle.” As soon as the child was conceived, the neshama can go to Olam HaBah. Certainly, if the child is born, even if it does not live long, the child can go to Olam HaBah. This was part of Miriam’s complaint against her father: Pharaoh only decreed death for Jewish children in this world; your decree dooms them from having a chance to enter Olam HaBah.

This is a consolation for people who sometimes find themselves in such an unfortunate situation. They should know that it is not for naught they have toiled.

I want to share an incredible incident that happened with the Gaon of Vilna (GR”A). The GR”A had a disciple who was childless for the first twenty years of his marriage. Finally, they had a baby, but shortly after the baby was born, the baby died. The Gaon came to the couple to be menachem avel. Only the Gaon could say what he said. He told the couple that the neshama of their deceased child belonged to a very famous figure in Jewish history known as the Graf Pototsky (c. 1700 – May 23, 1749).

The Graf Pototsky was a Polish nobleman who converted to Judaism. He was a Ger Tzedek. The Government told him that if he refused to renounce his Judaism, he would be burned at the stake. On Shavuos 5509, he was burned at the stake in the middle of the Vilna town square. He was a nobleman who could have had a life of luxury, yet he died Al Kiddush HaShem! He converted and not only did he give up everything but he died a martyr’s death!

The Gaon told the couple that the neshama of the Graf Pototsky was a perfect neshama – except there was only one thing he was lacking: He was not born Jewish. He was born as a goy and he converted. In order for his neshama to achieve perfection, he had to be born of a Jewish mother. That is what happened with this woman’s pregnancy and delivery. After that mission was accomplished, the neshama could leave this world and return to the Olam HaEmes completely perfected.

We don’t know the calculations of the Almighty, but sometimes a neshama needs to come into this world albeit

briefly, and sometimes it does not even make it into this world. But even such a neshama can be zoche to Olam HaBah (merit the World to Come).

Be Careful What You Daven For

“His sister stood at a distance to learn what would happen to him.” (Shemos 2:6).

Moshe’s parents hid their son for three months. After three months, they could not hide him any longer. They put him in a basket and sent him floating down the river. Miriam, his sister, stood at the river bank to see what was going to be with her baby brother.

Who should come down to bathe in the river? It is none other than Pharaoh’s daughter! Pharaoh was the perpetrator of the decree “All male children shall be thrown into the Nile” and his daughter comes down to bathe at that moment! Miriam must have been praying to the Almighty at that moment “Please, Hashem, don’t let her see the baby!” Miriam must have been thinking that Pharaoh’s daughter would certainly want to enforce her father’s decree.

What happened? It was just the opposite of Miriam’s worst fears. Pharaoh’s daughter does see the baby. She takes him into the palace with her and raises him in the house of Pharaoh. He becomes the savior of Israel. The lesson of this story is: Be careful of what you daven for. A person never really knows what is good. Miriam thinks it would be the worst thing in the world for Pharaoh’s daughter to spot her brother. In the end, that turned out to be his salvation and the salvation of Klal Yisrael.

This is a classic example of the popular Yiddish saying, “A mensch tracht un G-t lacht” (a person thinks and G-d laughs). We see this in all areas of life. I often see situations where a bochur is going out with a girl and he wants the shidduch to happen. He prays to the Ribono shel Olam “Please Hashem, make this shidduch happen! Please Hashem, make this shidduch happen!” It doesn’t happen. The bochur is devastated. Oy vey is mir! (Woe is me!) Eventually, he marries someone else. Twenty years later, he sees what happened with that girl and what happened with the woman he married. He says, “You know G-d, You know what you are doing!”

The same thing happens in business. Sometimes a person has an opportunity in business and he thinks to himself “Oh! This is going to put me on Easy Street. This is how I am going to make my fortune!” At the last minute, the deal falls through and he thinks “Oh no! Woe is me!

What does the Ribono shel Olam have against me?”

Then, three years later, he reads that his potential partner is indicted for criminal activity, and he had been a complete crook. The person who felt that G-d somehow had it against him, now realizes that he would have been in the same situation as the fellow in jail.

This is the lesson of “His sister stood off at a distance.” We need to leave solutions up to the Ribono shel Olam. “That which is good in Your Eyes – do!” You know what is best. Hatov b’Einecha Aseh!

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Daily Digest for 12/23/2021

### **Meshech Hochmah on the Torah by R. Gidon Rothstein**

Meshech Hochmah has a long introduction to the book of Shemot. To be sure we also had time for some of the actual parashah, I have taken only parts of the introduction, but much of it was too good to pass up.

Moshe’s Special Role in Setting Up Torah

He makes a point the Torah itself made and Rambam (among others, such as Ran in his Derashot) emphasized, Moshe’s prophecy was proven true and eternal in a way qualitatively superior to all other prophets. Meshech Hochmah thinks all other prophets established their status either with miracles or by certification from an already-accepted prophet, such as Eliyahu telling the Jewish people Elisha would be prophet after him ,

Problem is, neither of those paths prove the truth of a prophet indubitably. Meshech Hochmah suggests such

prophets are more like how courts believe two unimpeached witnesses; we are required to believe them, and probably most often they are telling the truth, but there easily could be exceptions. In particular, he notes tradition's view of Hananiah b. Azur (a prophet of Yirmiyahu's time, see Yirmiyahu 28), originally a true prophet, who later switched to making false claims as if they were prophecies.

Second, if miracles are the reason we believe a prophet, if someone later finds ways to do more impressive miracles that person could uproot the original prophecy. To ensure that would not happen with Moshe, Gd raised the entire Jewish people to the level of prophecy, so they could themselves directly witness/experience Gd's speaking to Moshe panim el panim, face to face (as it were), and be sure this would not ever be replicated or replace. The knowledge and experience justifies rejecting any prophet who tries to reverse or change the Torah, allows us to be sure that prophet is false and to be put to death.

It is why Shemot 19:9 will say Gd is going to appear to Moshe in front of the people so they will believe in Moshe forever. Because we ourselves (as the continuations of our forefathers who stood at Sinai) experienced this, we know no other prophet can ever reach that level. (As a fascinating aside, he says Rambam dealt with these topics well in Yesodei ha-Torah 7 and 8, says all his words there are sanctified, and were without doubt said in a spirit of prophecy. Worth a whole discussion of its own.)

Free Will, Its Importance, and Moshe's Lack of It  
He struggles with Gd's having placed such confidence in Moshe, because what if Moshe went wrong after that, said things that were not what Gd had wanted, even, Gd forbid, inserted them into the Torah? His simple answer is that Gd removed Moshe's freewill; from that point on, Moshe was not fully his own person

He is not fully comfortable with the idea, because freewill (this too goes back at least to Rambam) is what makes people human, worthy servants of Gd. Angels have no freewill, always do what's right, yet Gd wants humans to serve. More, the human soul did no wrong before being placed in a body, yet Gd decided to place it in a body, because Gd valued the lifelong struggle to overcome our baser instincts, to rise to higher and higher levels. Why would Moshe be denied this path?

Instead, he says Moshe had worked on himself well enough to reach a level where almost all his freewill was gone anyway, and that's the human goal. He has pulled a switch, now lets us know overcoming freewill is a first stage, the ultimate goal is to reach a point where one is no longer even tempted, where there is no need to overcome oneself.

We might think Gd wants people to live human lives, encounter and overcome temptation in the name of serving Gd. That is not wrong, only incomplete. The more accurate expression of Meshech Hochmah's view sees the goal of service as being to ingrain it so fully it becomes literally nature, so we're no longer even tempted (this, too, goes back at least to Rambam in his Introduction to Avot.)

Surprising steps one and two: Moshe's prophecy has been firmly established by the entire Jewish people having been brought to enough of a level of prophecy to witness Gd's "face to face" interactions with Moshe, to therefore know, more certainly than any other prophet after, that Moshe's prophecy was true and would not be changed.

For Moshe to be the bearer of such prophecy, Gd had to be able to trust he would never go wrong, and did so by withdrawing his freewill, Moshe having already almost reached the height of human growth, where his freewill was no longer relevant anyway.

Yehoshu'a Also Shed His Freewill

All well and good, except tradition (he cites Makkot 11a) suggested Yehoshu'a too was empowered to include certain passages in the Torah, the last verses of the Torah or the parts about the cities of refuge.

Nedarim 22b also implies Yehoshu'a's prophecy was of a different type than other prophets, because it says that had the Jewish people not sinned, they would have been given only the Torah itself and the book of Yehoshu'a, suggesting there was something essential about his prophecy as well. If so, Meshech Hochmah assumes, Gd must have taken away his freewill as well, because it was impossible to have a prophet with such power who also had meaningful freewill.

To prove it was true for Yehoshu'a, Meshech Hochmah offers two ideas. First, when the spies go to Israel, Rava in Sotah 34b said Moshe changed his disciple's name from Hoshe'a to Yehoshu'a as a prayer that Gd protect him from joining the other spies. (Meshech Hochmah is

taking that to mean Gd will make it impossible for him, by withdrawing his freewill.)

In addition, Moshe tells the people he knows they will descend into idolatry after his death, Devarim 31;29, when they did not do so for all the time of Yehoshu'a. Midrashic tradition thought this showed a man's student counts as himself, that it was as if Moshe was still alive all of Yehoshu'a's life. If Yehoshu'a is a continuation of Moshe, presumably he too had achieved the lack of freewill.

#### Stopping the Sun

Their spiritual level explains their ability to stop the sun, according to Meshech Hochmah. The sun serves Gd as do angels, where only Gd's Will matters, feel compelled to act as they understand Gd's Will.

While people reach greater heights than angels (or heavenly bodies), they only do so by overcoming their animalistic instincts. Those who do so successfully can command the sun or moon, because they are at a higher level of Gd's service, with the significant caveat there must be a guarantee they will not backslide. Iyov 15;15 says Gd does not trust even His most holy ones, as it were, because people are generally susceptible to failure even after long times of success.

Moshe and Yehoshu'a were different in their having reached a state where regression was impossible, because they had slain their freewill.

Quite an introduction, with themes I bet we will see again in the future. But let's make sure to see two comments on actual verses of this parsha.

#### Moshe's Father, Legislator

When Gd first speaks to Moshe, 3;6, Gd says He is the Gd of your father, of Avraham, of Yitzhak, and Ya'akov. Theoretically, the first phrase meant the Gd of your father Avraham, but Meshech Hochmah suggests it means Amram. In what way? He points to Laws of Kings 9;1, where Rambam lists how mitzvot came into the world, six to Adam, one more to Noah, one to each of the Avot and then says Gd commanded Amram in many mitzvot.

I've struggled with that comment, because it is not clear where Rambam got the idea. Meshech Hochmah suggests this could be one contributing text, that Gd counts as the Gd of Moshe's father because Amram had been commanded in mitzvot.

I primarily notice it because it's a Rambam I wonder about from time to time. In addition, though, it reminds

us the process of bringing Gd's commandments into the world was more piecemeal than we might realize, one of those events being Amram's lifetime, when he preceded his son as a lawgiver to the Jewish people.

#### Coercion Helps Only Jews Do the Right Thing

Telling Moshe about the process it will take to get the Jews out of Egypt, Gd says He knows Par'oh will not let the Jews go, 3;19, ve-lo be-yad hazakah. Meshech Hochmah thinks it means Gd's mighty hand might eventually coerce Par'oh to release the Jews, but will never bring him to agree to release them.

This is in contrast to Jews, where tradition thinks (as Rambam famously phrased it in the second chapter of Laws of Divorce) a Jew who is forced to do the right thing, who seems to only be saying s/he wants to, really does want to, because the Jewish soul always wants to act properly, is sometimes waylaid by his/her baser instincts.

Not so with non-Jews like Par'oh, for whom coercion will eventually produce the needed outcome, but never the preferred change of heart in Par'oh himself.

Moshe and Yehoshu'a utilized their freewill to submit fully to Gd's Will, earning status as conduits for the Torah itself, because there was no worry they would regress. Moshe may have learned it from his father, whose being commanded in mitzvot linked him to Gd in ways similar to the Avot. And in ways Par'oh never managed to achieve, even coercion not enough to get him to reach internal change.

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from: **Rabbi Berel Wein** <genesis@torah.org> to: rabbiwein@torah.org date: Dec 23, 2021, 11:16 PM subject: Rabbi Wein - We Shouldn't Ignore this Lesson from Egypt

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Parshas Shemos We Shouldn't Ignore this Lesson from Egypt print

Nothing human is ever permanent. Perhaps the only exception to this rule is human nature itself, which, seemingly, has never changed from the days of the Garden of Eden until today. So, we should not be surprised by the narrative of the Torah in this week's portion.

The Jewish people have been in Egypt for centuries. They have lived off the fat of the Land in Goshen. They



were highly respected, apparently affluent, and thought themselves to be secure in their land of exile. The memory of their leader Joseph, who was the savior of Egypt, still lingered in their minds, and also in the minds of the general Egyptian public. But Joseph was gone already for centuries, and as the Jewish people multiplied and continued to succeed within the Egyptian population its government, through the Pharaoh, began to look askance at them. They were no longer fellow citizens or loyal subjects, but, rather, were now seen as a dangerous and insidious minority that, because of its birthright and success, could endanger Egyptian society.

There now arose a new era, different from the centuries that preceded it. When the Talmud teaches us that there arose a new Pharaoh, one of the opinions is that a new attitude towards the Jews, one of suspicion and jealousy was apparent. The Jews were now seen as being an internal enemy, a disloyal section of society, an existential threat to the pharaohs of Egypt specifically, and to Egyptian society generally.

The Midrash seems to indicate that the Jews were not sensitive enough to realize how dangerous the change of attitude towards them was, in the general Egyptian society. When Pharaoh requested volunteers to come forth to help him in his great building projects, we are taught that the Jews came en masse to help build those symbols of might and wealth of ancient Egypt. The Pharaoh then, and undoubtedly with the help and acquiescence of much of Egyptian society, removed from the Jews their voluntary status, until suddenly they found themselves slaves and servants of Egypt, and no longer merely sojourners in the country.

And there were Jews who were willing to cooperate with the governmental authorities in policing the Jewish slave society. Eventually, these Jews also found themselves to be the victims of the Pharaoh and his cruel decree. It is no wonder that so many Jews – according to various opinions of the rabbis of Talmud and Midrash – never were able to extricate themselves from Egypt, even when Moshe successfully led the Jewish people out of Egyptian bondage, and out of Egypt itself.

There is, undoubtedly, a pattern that the Torah introduces which will apply to all later exiles of the Jewish people throughout the world. The end of an era always occurs suddenly and unexpectedly, illogically, and shockingly. The story of the end European Jewry that occurred almost

a century ago is a sobering reminder of this pattern of exile. Jews should be wise enough to realize that ignoring the lessons of history is a truly fatal course in life.

Shabbat shalom,  
Rabbi Berel Wein

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[www.torah.org/learning/drasha](http://www.torah.org/learning/drasha) Parsha Parables By Rabbi  
Mordechai Kamenetzky

### **Drasha**

#### **By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky**

Parshas Shemos - Growth Investment

It was a test for the ages. The mighty Pharaoh commanded the midwives Shifra and Puah, known to us as Yocheved and her daughter Miriam, to kill all the boys born to Hebrew mothers. Not only did they ignore the edict, they countered it by nourishing the newborns with pacifying words and comforting amenities food and drink.. The Midrash tells us that they cared for the sick and unhealthy babies as well, nourishing them with prayers, and Hashem in heaven did not ignore their actions.

But the verses need some explanation. First the Torah tells us, “And G-d rewarded the midwives, and the nation flourished and prospered.” Only then does it add, “And it was as the midwives feared Hashem, and He made for them houses.” Rashi explains that both midwives were rewarded for their efforts with more than physical houses. They were rewarded with houses of Kohanim and kings. Hashem rewarded them well with generations of kings and priests, Divine attributes that are perpetuated through the species of humans that the midwives actually saved male Jewish children! A kohain can only be the son of a Kohain, and a King can only be a male!

But there seems to be an interruption in the order of the verses. The words “and the nation flourished” seem out of context. In fact, Rashi is bothered by the obvious question and explains the verses as follows. “And G-d rewarded the midwives,” and what was the reward? “He made for them houses.” The words “and the nation flourished” are part of the narrative, an historical footnote inserted into the middle of the episode of heroism and reward. But the simple, juxtaposed text needs clarification.

Perhaps there is a way to explain the historical insert  
More than 10 years ago, my brother, Reb Zvi and his wife had a beautiful little baby boy. He was truly beautiful. And he was truly little. Five weeks premature and only two-and-a-half pounds.

For a while it was touch and go. The prayers of a community and thousands of friends and relatives pulsed the support systems that sustained the child's short breaths and the parents' deep hopes. For nearly two months the baby endured in the neo-natal unit under the care of the most prestigious doctors and devoted nurses that the city of Chicago had to offer. After two grueling months of prayers, incubators, and devoted healthcare, the baby arrived home healthy. The joy and gratitude to Hashem was overwhelming, but the young father did not forget his gratitude and appreciation to the mortal messengers, the entire medical and nursing staff, who worked arduously, day and night, to help insure the newborn's health.

He wanted to express his appreciation in a very special way. He searched gift shops and bookstores for a proper memento to show his appreciation, but he could not come up with an appropriate gift. A few days after the baby was brought home, the young father mentioned his dilemma to his Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Eliyahu Svei, Dean of the Philadelphia Yeshiva.

"The nurses don't want perfume, and the doctors don't need pens," said Rabbi Svei. "What they want to see is the continued growth and health of your child. Every year, on his birthday, bring the child to the hospital and let the staff share in the joy of his growth and success! That will be the most meaningful gift you can offer!"

The Rosh Yeshiva explained: Before the Torah mentions an additional reward bestowed upon the midwives, it alludes to the greater reward that they truly appreciated. Their efforts towards Jewish perpetuity were not in vain. The nation prospered. The young babies, whom they worked so diligently to sustain, grew up. And they married, and they flourished. All the midwives wanted was the propagation of their nation. And that was their first reward. The gift of Houses of the Priesthood and the Houses of Royalty were an added bonus which was Hashem was pleased to deliver. But as far as the midwives were concerned, the greatest reward was the joy in seeing that the children they delivered flourished, and that the nation prospered and grew. All the risks were

worth it for that knowledge alone. And so the Torah tells us, "and Hashem made good for the midwives, and the nation grew and flourished." For them, that was the greatest reward. The rest was just icing on the just desserts.

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subject: Rabbi Zweig

### **Rabbi Yochanan Zweig**

This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Professor William Schwartz. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

### **Root Cause of Antisemitism**

But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were disgusted because of the people of Israel (1:12). On the face of it, this verse seems a little hard to understand. What exactly were the Egyptians disgusted with and for what reason? Rashi (ad loc) explains that "they were disgusted with their own lives." Though Rashi explains what they were disgusted with (their own lives) he doesn't provide the reason for their disgust and their harsh reaction. In fact, this has been an existential question that has haunted the Jewish people for two millennia: Why do so many people hate us? What did we ever do to them to incite the need to exterminate or expel us from their lands?

The answer is actually given in the verse itself. Pharaoh and the Egyptians were on a mission to eradicate the nation through excessive taxation and hard labor. Yet "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." In other words, the more they did to us the more successful we became, particularly in growing as a nation. Our incredible success under the harshest conditions highlighted their own inadequacies as a nation. It began to dawn on them that compared to the Jewish nation they were far inferior. That is why, Rashi explains, they

were disgusted with their own lives. Frankly, seeing our ascension made them feel terrible about themselves.

Unfortunately, this has been repeated throughout history. The Germans, soundly defeated after World War I, were both embarrassed and impoverished. This became a breeding ground for the most virulent antisemitism because they needed to feel that they weren't at fault; rather it was the fault of the Jews who controlled

everything and were a malevolent subhuman life form. Therefore, the Jews should be exterminated. If one travels through Poland and Ukraine it will become readily apparent how miserable the populace is and why antisemitism is “mother’s milk” in these countries. The root cause of antisemitism is a host country’s deep dissatisfaction with their own lives; particularly as it is contrasted by the success of the Jews. Obviously, their ready solution to feeling better about themselves is to eliminate those that highlight their inadequacies.

#### A Deafening Silence

The Talmud (Sotah 11a) tells us that Pharaoh had three advisers: Yisro, Iyov, and Bilaam. When Pharaoh was deciding how to approach his “Jewish Problem” he sought the opinion of each of his three advisers. Bilaam, the grandson of Lavan (according to some opinions he actually was Lavan), was an evil man and relished the prospect of eradicating the Jewish people. It was he who advised Pharaoh to enslave the people, destroy their identity, and later to kill the male babies. Iyov was a righteous man who was opposed to any plan to destroy the Jewish nation. Yet, rather than display his true feelings on the issue, he refrained from offering any opinion. Perhaps he knew that his objections would be met with resistance. He most likely rationalized that he could do more to help the plight of the Jewish people at a later date by remaining in his position as advisor. As a result, he decided not to oppose or accept Bilaam’s proposal, but remained silent.

Yisro, on the other hand, objected to Pharaoh’s characterization of the Jews as a “problem” and rejected the idea of exterminating the Jewish people. Yisro’s protests angered Pharaoh and Yisro had to flee Egypt in order to save his life. The Talmud continues by telling us that each of the three advisers was rewarded or punished according to his deed. Bilaam, who encouraged the execution of thousands of innocent Jews, was killed by the very people he sought to exterminate. Iyov, who remained silent in the face of Jewish oppression, was afflicted with a life of tremendous emotional pain (first he slowly lost all his possessions and then his children died) and physical suffering (his body became covered in boils to the point he wouldn’t leave his house). Yisro, who fled because of his opposition, sacrificing his position of leadership and life of comfort and wealth in Egypt, eventually became the father-in-law of Moshe and his

descendants became prominent judicial leaders of the Children of Israel.

We know that a very basic tenet of Judaism is that God repays a person measure for measure. Therefore, we can clearly understand the reward and punishment of Yisro and Bilaam. However, why was Iyov’s punishment so severe? Iyov did not support the decree of persecution against the Jewish people. Iyov’s only sin was remaining silent. Why then did he have to suffer such a harsh life, one where tragedy followed tragedy?

The reason that Iyov’s suffering is clearly more severe than even Bilaam’s punishment is because his reaction was the unwitting cause the Jewish nation’s suffering in Egypt. How? In every generation there are madmen who have no qualms about the murder of entire civilizations to achieve their warped goals. What keeps them in check? Mainstream society saying this is not okay, that the ends do not justify the means.

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#### **The “Decision”**

##### **Rabbi Moshe Taragin**

The birth of Moshe represents a turning point of the Jewish saga in Egypt. This would-be savior is arrived as the Jewish slaves are being mercilessly crushed by Egyptian oppression. Pharo had legislated that all Jewish infants be flung into the Nile river and delivered to their inevitable death; Egyptian discrimination had begotten slavery and slavery had morphed into genocide. It appeared as if the entire Jewish nation was slated for annihilation. At this dark moment the greatest man to ever inhabit our planet is born. The epic birth of Moshe is preceded by verses describing the “marriage” of his parents- Amram and Yocheved. Stunningly, these verses conceal the true identity of Moshe’s parents. The Torah merely narrates about a “man” from the house of Levi who married a “woman” from the house of Levi, subsequently giving birth to Moshe. Why is Moshe’s birth introduced with the story of his parent’s marriage which had occurred decades earlier? After all, Moshe was the third child and this couple had already produced two

older siblings- Aharon and Miriam. Why is the birth of this future ‘savior’, who transformed Jewish history, framed with this mysterious marriage of people whose identities are disguised?

The Midrash fills in the blanks and provides an interesting “backstory”. Facing devastating Egyptian cruelty, Amram, Moshe’s father, separated from his wife Yocheved. Whether he formally divorced her is unclear, but he certainly discontinued normal marital relations. Expanding their family under these circumstances would be pointless and even pathetic - as it would just provide more fodder for the crocodiles of the Nile. Without any horizons of hope, continued family life seemed futile and ridiculous and Amram, at least initially, chose the only practical option- surrender.

His daughter Miriam- Moshe’s older sister- intervened, pleading with her father to reconsider his fateful decision. As Amram was a high-profile leader, his decision would inevitably trigger “copycat behavior” leading to wide-scale divorces and the complete unraveling of Jewish family life in Egypt. Heeding his daughter’s warning, Amram reunites with his wife Yocheved, reinforcing the value of Jewish family despite the unbearable pressure of Egyptian torture. For this reason, Amram’s “decision” is presented anonymously: his “personal” decision to reunite with Yocheved had ripple effects for countless “other” marriages and therefore his decision is described in collective or generic terms.

This private decision ultimately reshapes human history. Amram faces a nightmarish world in which newborn babies are fed to voracious beasts. He sees no purpose in further expanding his family so he “folds his tent”. However, he soon discovers that, although we can’t always control the broader calculus of our “broken world”, we can author our own personal decisions in response to the surrounding chaos. We never abdicate the ability to maintain the “moral line” and make decisions of “conscience” even if the surrounding world doesn’t accommodate those decisions. For reasons which often lie beyond human comprehension, G-d sometimes allows evil to flourish. It is difficult to decipher this mystery and we often struggle to understand Divine logic in a bleak world of rampaging evil. Despite these ‘unknowns’ and the frustration it sometimes causes we are empowered to maintain our own religious and moral convictions even if we can’t calculate how these values will impact an

uninviting world. Like Amram we often must act with moral courage and rely upon G-d to ‘solve’ the broader calculus.

I often ponder Holocaust survivors who quickly remarried and rebuilt their families while bringing new babies into their world. What were they thinking and how could they introduce new life into such a bleak and nightmarish world? Little did they know that the children born in the immediate aftermath of WWII would, one day, march in the fields of redemption and pioneer a new era of history. Little did they know that children born in refugee camps, or in temporary havens across the globe, would one day resettle the Jewish homeland on behalf of Jewish history.

They couldn’t have foreseen this outcome and yet they labored on under unimaginable conditions, maintaining their moral courage. Human beings often must take the initiative, exhibiting fortitude and defiance even if the arch of history is confusing and the ultimate trajectory of their actions unclear. Our inability to decipher the broader equation doesn’t acquit us from responsibility to sustain our religious and moral duties.

Chazal mention that after this reunion Yocheved – aged 130- experienced a physical rejuvenation, enabling her to become pregnant with a little boy named Moshe. Had Amram not heeded Miriam’s call, this miraculous rejuvenation may not have occurred. Even if it did, it may not have mattered, as Yocheved would have remained unmarried. G-d often awaits human initiative and provides supernatural intervention only after humans have defied their conditions and launched their own redemptive cycles.

The Amram saga also reminds us that moral energy, and not headline-grabbing events, drive human history. Amram’s “epic” decision, hatched privately and without fanfare or public notice, changed history. It was a quiet decision to continue building family life under crushing conditions of persecution that turned the tide. In a modern world of fanfare and self-promotion, it is ever more crucial to remind ourselves that it is the daily ‘unnoticed’ moral decisions which alter history. Politics come and go and policies and decisions of one generation are quickly swept away by the sands of time or erased by future generations. Even military confrontations, which appear to deeply impact the shape of human experience, leave only temporary impressions upon history. More often it is

the quiet moral decisions taken day after day – which go largely unnoticed- that shape our own lives and deeply impact the lives of our families and communities. The impact of these decisions can ricochet for generations-long after political and military influences have faded. With all of Pharo’s decrees and public posturing, it was a quiet decision of a husband and would-be father that turned the tide of history.

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from: **Rabbi Eliezer Parkoff**  
<rabbiparkoff@gmail.com> date: Dec 23, 2021, 9:29 AM  
subject: Rabbi Parkoff’s Chizuk Letter - Shmos - I Will Be What I Will Be: Gilui Shechina

Shemos  
I Will Be What I Will Be: Gilui Shechina  
Adapted from a lecture by Mori v’Rabi **Hagaon Hatzaddik Rav Zeidel Epstein ztzuk** ו"ו, תשמ"ט.  
And Moshe said to G-d, "Behold I will come to the children of Israel, and I will say to them, 'The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they will say to me, 'What is His name?' what shall I say to them?" G-d said to Moshe, "Ek-yeh asher Ek-yeh (I will be what I will be)." And He said, "So shall you say to the children of Israel, 'Ek-yeh (I will be) has sent me to you.'" (Shemos 3:13-14)

A simple reading of the possuk raises some questions. There are two statements explaining what Hashem’s name is. Why did He have to repeat Himself?

Rashi (quoting Brachos 9b) appears to be addressing this question:

I will be what I will be: “I will be” with them in this oppression, “what I will be” with them in their future oppressions under other kingdoms. [Then] [Moshe] said before Him, “O Lord of the universe! Why should I mention to them more troubles? They have enough [difficulty] with this one.” Hashem answered him, “You have spoken well. So shall you say, etc.”

We see from Rashi, that Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe the meaning of the great Name: that not only is Hashem with them in Mitzrayim, He will be with them in their future oppressions in all the exiles (שעבוד מלכיות). Moshe thereupon became very perturbed. Why mention any other future problems? It was like Hashem was saying, don’t worry, there’ll be more problems to come.

Then Hashem agreed to Moshe Rabbeinu and told him to only mention that Hashem will be with them and help them depart from Mitzrayim.

There is a parenthesis in Rashi: Not that Moshe, G-d forbid, outsmarted G-d. However, he did not understand what G-d meant. [He thought that Hashem was telling him to relate this to Yisroel.] Really, when G-d said, “I will be what I will be,” He told this to Moshe alone, and never intended that Moshe should tell this to Yisroel. That is the meaning of “You have spoken well,” for that was My original intention, that you should not tell such things to the children of Israel, only “So shall you say to the children of Israel,” ‘Ekyeh [I will be] has sent me.’”

According to this annotation, Hashem had always intended that Moshe Rabbeinu should only tell Klal Yisroel about the Yetzias Mitzrayim, and not about any future problems. Hashem told Moshe alone the real meaning of His name so that Moshe himself should know the truth.

However, the explanation of this annotation doesn’t seem to fit the possuk. Moshe asked, what should I tell them and Hashem responded regarding the entire future events, not just the part about Mitzrayim. A simple reading doesn’t suggest that Hashem’s intention was for Moshe Rabbeinu alone to know this secret. The secret of this great Name Ekyeh asher Ekyeh was really meant for the entire Klal Yisroel. Just right now while suffering their tribulations in Mitzrayim they couldn’t handle it. But it was written in the Torah for all of us to know. The explanation of the parenthesis doesn’t fit the possuk. Moshe was asking what to tell all of Klal Yisroel and it wasn’t a question that Moshe Rabbeinu wanted to know personally only. Rather, he wanted to know what to tell Klal Yisroel. Rashi according to the annotation does not fit the possuk.

The Purpose of Creation

In order to answer this, we must first understand the basic purpose of the entire Creation: Hashem wants us to recognize and be vividly aware of Him. That is called Gilui Shechina (Revelation of Hashem’s presence), when G-d can be clearly seen. Everyone should see Hashem’s presence everywhere in everything. This is the purpose of the entire creation. The creation should announce and publicize מלבדו אין עוד Ein Od Milvado – There is no power other than Hashem! Just by observing how things operate in the world everyone should see that there is a Creator; just one, no other. One who understands, sees everything. And not just only one G-d. There is no other power. Everything in the universe is Hashem. Where ever

one looks he should see the handiwork of G-d. When we look up to the heavens, we don't see just the heavens, we see Your heavens.

The entire creation shouts out "there is a Creator." It's like a painting from a famous painter from many years ago. It sells for thousands, because it's so and so's painting. It's an original. The experts look at it and they immediately recognize the painter. His expertise. His special style. It's obviously a Rembrandt or a Van Gough. Look how he wove the colors together and how it is so full of expression. We novices only see some colors.

Handwriting. You go to an analyst and write a few lines. All you see are some pen marks on the paper. It's nothing. But he looks at it and sees everything. This letter goes up, that letter goes down, and he sees your whole personality in those lines. All you see are some scribbles on the paper.

That's the Universe. Everywhere we look it utters: this was made by the Ribono Shel Olam. Before the sin, everything was pure and there was pure Gilui Shechina. Now after the sin, Hashem is hidden. That is called hester – הַסְתֵּר. We don't see. But even in hester there is Gilui Shechina; unending Gilui Shechina.

That's our job. To see Shechina everywhere. We must remember that everywhere has the possibility to see Shechina; but it also has the power to cover over the Shechina so that all you see is Nature.

Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of the Mir, in Sichos Musar, Parshas Vayechi (תשל"א) writes that this darkness which is intertwined in Hashem's actions has a very important task. Hashem intentionally covers over His presence in everything and created "Nature" in order to allow us free will.

We know Hashem always hides the most wondrous miracles in natural phenomena. They always have the aura about them that they were actually merely natural or near natural phenomena. The miracle of the splitting of the Sea was covered over with nature: "And Hashem moved the water with a strong east wind the entire night..."

This was done to leave some room for mistake. Otherwise, it would be as if free will has been taken away from Mankind. Our job is to reveal the Shechina everywhere we can. We have to remember that nature is merely Hashem's way of giving us room to err.

The Ramban asks a difficult question. Chazal tell us that Yocheved, Moshe Rabbeinu's mother, was born on the trip down to Mitzrayim. In parshas Vayigash the Ibn Ezra asks, if so, when we make a simple calculation, we see that she was 130 years old when she gave birth to Moshe. Sarah was only 90 years old when she gave birth to Yitzchak and that was considered a miracle. Why wasn't Yocheved's giving birth at the age of 130 mentioned as a miracle? The Ramban then proceeds to enlighten us with a very important principle. Only miracles that are announced in advance by a prophet or a malach (angel) are mentioned in the Torah as miracles. Unannounced miracles that occur to help the tzaddikim are left unmentioned. Even the greatest miracles in which the laws of nature are openly circumvented, if not announced in advance, they go unmentioned. What the Torah calls a miracle is when a navi or a malach comes to inform us that it will happen.

Let us try to elucidate the Ramban's explanation. It fits in beautifully with what we said above. The purpose of a miracle is to make it clear that there is a Creator. There is no other reason for miracles. The Ramban (at the end of parshas Bo) states that all of nature is a miracle. The possuk in Krias Shema tells us that if we follow the Torah the rain will fall in the right time. Isn't that a miracle? And now that we have that possuk, if we don't follow the Torah, and the rain still falls, isn't that a miracle? All of nature is a miracle. But it is a hidden miracle. An open miracle is announced in advance in order to publicize it.

This is the difference between ha'oras panim and gilui Shechina as opposed to hester panim and hester Shechina. Gilui Shechina is to see the Ribono Shel Olam, and hester Shechina is when we don't see the Shechina.

We are used to thinking that when everything goes well and we see the bracha, that is gilui Shechina. But when everything is not good, when one is not healthy, when parnessa is hard, when he has problems, he is not receiving the bracha. That is hester.

That is a mistake.

R. Yaakov Emden writes that there is no miracle as great as the existence of Klal Yisroel among the goyim. When Yidden go through all their hardships and still continue to exist and remain Yidden that's the greatest miracle. R. Yaakov Emden writes, "We think that gilui Shechina is in ha'oras panim (when everything goes good). But when everything goes bad in hester panim there is no gilui

Shechina. I will reveal to you a secret, writes Rav Yaakov Emden. In hester panim there is more gilui Shechina than in gilui Shechina alone. Because when there is hester, and yet the Ribono Shel Olam continues to support you, that's a miracle. The fact that the poverty-stricken person continues living and has a piece of bread to eat is a bigger miracle than the wealthy man's supper. The wealthy person's existence looks normal. He's got money, he has supper. But the poor man's supper is a miracle. When an ill person remains alive and continues living, we see more chessed than by a healthy person.

Let us return to Moshe Rabbeinu by the burning bush. Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Ribono Shel Olam, if Klal Yisroel ask me what Hashem's name is, what should I tell them? His question wasn't simply what Hashem's name is. Moshe Rabbeinu was asking how Hashem was interacting with Klal Yisroel. Hashem's name reflects His interaction with the world: chesed, rachamim, din, etc. Which attribute should I tell Klal Yisroel? Hakadosh Baruch Hu answered, "My name is Gilui Shechina, Ekyeh asher Ekyeh." As Rashi said "I am with them in this oppression, I will be with them in future oppressions. I am always with them." This is the greatest Gilui Shechina possible: that Hashem is with us in our most difficult times. That's the most wonderful announcement possible. No matter what goes wrong, Hashem is with us. "Klal Yisroel is with Me, and I am with Klal Yisroel." Chas v'shalom we shouldn't lose sight of this. We have to constantly pay attention. Wherever Klal Yisroel went into galus, the Shechina went first. So Hakadosh Baruch Hu told Moshe Rabbeinu, Ekyeh asher Ekyeh, I'll be with you throughout all the tzoros, because in tzorus there is more Gilui Shechina, Tell Klal Yisroel the secret of Gilui Shechina, Moshe Rabbeinu answered, why should I tell them there will be more tzoros? They won't be able to understand the message that tzoros are the greatest Gilui Shechina. So the Ribono Shel Olam agreed, if they are not capable of accepting this statement for the moment, don't tell them. But Moshe Rabbeinu had to know it. And it's the truth. And now this truth was written in the Torah for us all to know.

The Ribono Shel Olam told Klal Yisroel, there isn't a minute that He doesn't think about Klal Yisroel. Our job is to never forget this. Wherever we mention Hashem's name, that is where bracha is.

Chazal have told us to make 100 brachos each day. Why 100 brachos each day? Because this is 100 times "bestowing His Name." Every time we make a bracha "baruch ato Hashem..." we are declaring, Ribono Shel Olam You are here. You are "the One who gives the tired person strength," "the One who frees a bound-up person," "the One who supports those who fall." You, everything is You. You give me a piece of bread to eat. Every time a Jew recites a bracha, he declares, "There is a Borei Olam." The same is true of tefilla. Tefilla means that we recite the idea that "I have nothing, everything belongs to the Creator." When we realize this we are allowing the bracha to come down upon us.

The Rambam states in his 13 Principles of Faith: "I believe with perfect faith that there is none other to whom it is proper to daven." There is nowhere else to ask, only the Ribono Shel Olam.

The avodah of a Yid is לנגדי תמיד "I put Hashem before me constantly." And where do we find that? In the very beginning of the Shulchan Aruch. A person has barely woken up and he says Modeh Ani, he's fulfilling שויתי. And if there's a שויתי then there's a bracha. Mention Hashem's name, and that allows the bracha to flow. But if one doesn't recognize Hashem, if he rattles off the bracha without thinking, then the bracha won't take effect. It even has the opposite effect, it corrupts the world because he is proclaiming hester not gilui. The very first thing he must do is to proclaim, "Ribono Shel Olam, I know that everything that I have is from You."

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OU Torah Vayigdal Moshe

**Shmos**

**Rabbi Benzion Twerski**

וירא אלקים את בני ישראל וידע אלקים בכח:

The pasuk says two things: a) Hashem saw, b) Hashem knew. The Beis Ha'Levi brings a Medrash that says there was a kitrug against Klal Yisrael of halalu ovdei avodah zarah v'halalu ovdei avodah zarah – why is Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu showing preference to the Jews if they were doing avodah zarah like the Mitzrim? The answer that Hashem gave to that charge is that, unlike the Mitzrim, the Jews were only doing avodah zarah as a result of the slavery and resultant madness (tiruf ha'daas) with which they were stricken. That is what the pasuk, according to this Medrash, is saying: Hashem saw the situation, and

He knew that it was only as a result of the impossible circumstances that they slipped into avodah zarah. The Beis Ha'Levi says that from this we see a definition of ohnes (something done out of coercion). Only if the person would not have done it otherwise, does the exemption of ohnes apply. The fact that the Beis Ha'Levi pins this idea on this particular Medrash apparently seems to be drush, but it is nonetheless a fundamental, very-practical concept.

Regarding shogeig (an aveirah done accidentally), as well, we find numerous times in Shas that it is only considered shogeig if the individual would not have done it had he known all the pertinent details. Therefore, someone who has accustomed himself to ignoring the prohibition of eating forbidden fats (cheilev), for example, cannot bring a korban chatas even if he one time ate cheilev by accident. Even though, at that current moment, he thought that he was eating shuman (permitted fats) and that is what he was intending to do, he still cannot bring a korban chatas, because even had he known it was cheilev, he would have no qualms eating it. The Gemara, based on darshening the pasuk, calls this someone who is not shav mi'yediaso – proper knowledge of the situation would not have stopped him from doing what he did.

It is not merely a gezeiras ha'kasuv that someone who is not a shav mi'yediaso cannot bring a korban chatas. It is that this teaches us the definition of shogeig. One is only a shogeig if the lack of awareness is what caused him to do the aveirah.

Likewise when it comes to ohnes. In every action, there are two components: the physical action itself, and the intention behind the action (daas). When someone holds a gun to a Jew's head and demands he eat a treif sandwich, why is that considered an ohnes? It is not as if the man stuffed the treif food down his throat. If someone grabbed his hand on Shabbos and forcibly hit the light switch with it, that is readily understandable as an ohnes, because the very action was completely coerced. The Beis Ha'Levi is not talking about that type of ohnes. [Ed. note of elaboration: In other words, even someone who is a mumar to be mechaleil Shabbos would in fact still benefit from the exemption of ohnes if the actual physical action was coerced upon him, as in the case of someone grabbing his hand and pushing it against the light switch.]

But why is it that, when a Jew eats a treif sandwich because he very much wants to save his life, it is considered an ohnes? The answer is that he is coerced as far as the intent is concerned. The decision to eat was forced upon him. If you think about it, you will see that most of the ohnsim in Shas are coercion vis a vis the daas component.

The fact that someone who knowingly did an aveirah is granted an exemption of ohnes when his decision was coerced upon him (whether by force, as in the above example, or by justifiable error in judgment) even though the action itself was not, is a chalos din. It is a particular status of exemption that the Torah assigns him. And someone who would have done the aveirah regardless of that ohnes is not given the benefit of that exemption. A practical example of this would be in a situation of pikuach nefesh on Shabbos, and there are two Jewish ambulance drivers available: one frum and one who is a mechaleil Shabbos. One might have thought, “take the non-frum driver since he anyway is going to be mechaleil Shabbos.” But the truth is just the opposite. The frum driver has an exemption of ohnes. The mitzvah of va'chai bahem mandates that he do melacha to save another Jew's life. However, the non-frum driver does not have that. Since he would anyway do melacha, his chilul Shabbos – even in a case that would generally constitute an ohnes, such as pikuach nefesh – does not carry that exemption. It remains chilul Shabbos with all the severity thereof. Therefore, one must opt to take the frum driver.

Of course, if there is only a non-frum driver, one must go with him. Even though his chilul Shabbos R"l remains full fledged chilul Shabbos, even that is pushed aside because of va'chai bahem.

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from: **Rav Immanuel Bernstein**

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date: Dec 23, 2021, 6:59 AM

subject: Dimensions in Shemos

Signs for the Non-Believers

וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהוּן לֹא יִאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקוֹלִי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים

Moshe responded and said, “But they will not believe me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say ‘Hashem did not appear to you’.”[1]

Introduction: “But they will not believe me”



The middle section of our parsha discusses the episode of the burning bush, where Hashem appears to Moshe and charges him with taking the Jewish people out of Egypt. As our verse relates, Moshe was concerned that the people would not believe him. In response to this, Hashem provided him with three signs to perform in order to verify his status as Hashem's emissary.

Should Moshe have had Cause for Concern?

If we reflect on the situation of the Jewish people at that time we will better understand where Moshe's concerns were coming from.

Timing: Firstly, it was well-known that their exile had been foretold to their forefather, Avraham, who had been informed that it would last for four hundred years. The people had currently been in Egypt for little over two hundred years. Even if they harbored hope for the future redemption, that was not something they were expecting to see in their lifetimes.

Identity of the Redeemer: Additionally, even if they accepted the idea that they could be redeemed now, no one was expecting that the redeemer would be Moshe, whom they had not seen for decades. If anyone, it would be Aharon, who had been together with them and prophesying for them in Egypt during this time.

It would appear, then, Moshe was correct in suspecting that his message would be met with reservations on the part of the people. Moreover, the very fact that Hashem responded by providing Moshe with signs to verify his words, as opposed to simply saying "don't worry, they will believe you," indicates that Moshe was right in suspecting that such measures might be needed.

And yet, at the same time, this entire matter is completely astounding. For when we look just a few verses earlier,[2] we see that Hashem has already addressed this matter, explicitly assuring Moshe, "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ – they will listen to you"! How, then, could Moshe say – in direct contradiction of these words – that they people would not listen to him?[3]

Two Types of Listening

To answer the above question, let us consider that the idea of "listening to someone" can have more than one meaning:

It is possible to "listen to someone" in the sense of giving them a hearing and considering what they have to say, without necessarily then going along with it.

Another type of "listening to someone" denotes heeding

their words and following what they say.

How can we know to which of these types of listening the Torah is referring? The key is in noting whether the "listening" is followed by the letter lamed – "lishmoa le'kol," or the letter beis – "lishmoa be'kol":

The letter lamed, which means "to", denotes distance from A to B. Hence, listening "לקול" indicates that the listener is distinct from the speaker and it is he who will determine whether or not he follows the speaker's wishes. The letter beis, which means "with" or "in", denotes the proximity of A with B. Accordingly, listening "בקול" entails B heeding A's words and following them.

In Parshas Lech Lecha,[4] we are told of how Sarah (then Sarai), upon seeing that she had not born children, advises Avraham (then Avram) to take Hagar as a wife.

The verse describes Avraham's response:

וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם לְקוֹל שָׂרָי

Avram listened to his Sarai's voice.

In that instance, Avraham heard Sarah's idea, considered it and concurred with it. Hence the term "לקול" is used.

In contrast to this, after the birth of Yitzchak, when Sarah sees that Yishmael is a danger to him and she demands of Avraham to banish Hagar and Yishmael from the house, we are told by the Torah that Avraham did not concur with this idea, rather, "the matter was very bad in his eyes"! [5] Nevertheless, Hashem told Avraham to heed Sarah's voice in spite of his objections, and hence the term used is "בקול".

כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלַיךָ שָׂרָה שְׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ

Everything that Sarah tells you, heed her voice.[6]

Applying this idea to our verses, we can see that here, too, Hashem's original assurance to Moshe was "וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ". With these words, Hashem was telling Moshe that the people would give him a hearing. This, however, did not guarantee him a following, or that they would necessarily even believe him. This is especially understood when we consider why they would listen to him in the first place. Rashi explains that their attention was guaranteed on account of Moshe using the words "פָּקֵד פְּקֻדָּתִי – I have indeed taken account,"[7] which were known to be the words with which the redeemer would introduce himself. However, the very fact that this was known meant that a person using these words did not necessarily mean he was the redeemer. It did ensure, however, that people would hear what he had to say, as denoted by the words "וְשָׁמְעוּ"

לִקְלֹף". In light of this, Moshe proceeds to raise the concern that, even after having heard his voice, "וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ" – they will not heed my voice." This concern was indeed validated by Hashem, Who then gave Moshe the signs to perform before the people.[8]

A truly stunning example of how attention to detail, down to the letter, opens up the words and messages of the verses.

The First Two Signs – Was the Second Sign Better than the First?

In response to Moshe's concerns, Hashem provided him with two signs in order to verify his status as the emissary for redemption:

His staff turned into snake upon being thrown onto the ground, returning to be a staff when he picked it up.

His hand became leprous when he placed it in his tunic, becoming healed again as he replaced it there.

After presenting the second sign, Hashem informs Moshe:

וְהָיָה אִם לֹא יִצְמִינּוּ לָךְ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקֹל הָאֵת הָרִאשׁוֹן וְהִצְמִינּוּ לְקֹל הָאֵת הַשֵּׁנִי

It shall be that if they do not believe you and do not listen to the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the latter sign.[9]

The basic question is: Why would they believe the second sign more than the first. Given that both signs were miraculous, why would one miracle be more convincing than another?

Rashi presents a most astonishing answer to this question: Once you tell them "I was stricken on your account, because I spoke lashon hara (slander) about you," they will believe you; for they have already learned regarding such matters that those who attack them in order to harm them are stricken with tzoraas, as were Pharaoh and Avimelech on account of Sarah.

The background to Rashi's explanation is the idea that the second sign, which involved Moshe's hand becoming leprous, came as a punishment for him speaking negatively about the Jewish people. Once he communicated this aspect of the sign to the people they would be more convinced that he was indeed Hashem's emissary.[10]

What emerges from this explanation of Rashi is that there was nothing about the second sign per se that made it more convincing than the first; rather, it was specifically the accompanying commentary that it came as a

punishment that would hopefully bring the people round.[11] Needless to say, this explanation is categorized as drash, as it draws on an aspect of the sign which is not contained in the words of the verses themselves. This then leaves us wondering: Is there a pshat answer to why the second sign would be more convincing?

One of the great commentators on Rashi, the Be'er Yitzchak, explains that in fact there is no pshat answer to this question, because on a pshat level, the question doesn't begin.

Pshat and Drash – Literal and Non-Literal?

When coming to formulate the difference between pshat and drash, we might be inclined to phrase it as being that pshat represents the literal meaning of the words, while drash is the non-literal meaning. However, that formulation is not only imprecise, sometimes the exact opposite is true.

Pshat represents the straightforward reading of the verse. Sometimes, in order to arrive at the straightforward meaning, one is required to exercise a certain degree of latitude with the words, not necessarily taking them literally as stated. In our instance, there are commentators who explain that when Hashem says "if they do not listen to the first sign, they will listen to the second," it means, "the second sign together with the first." According to this approach, the contribution of the second sign was not qualitative, but corroborative. In other words, there was not necessarily anything inherently more convincing about the second sign; rather, now there will be two signs, and two signs are more convincing than one.

Thus far on a pshat level. However, says the Be'er Yitzchak, one of the classic methods of drash is specifically to engage in the words as they were literally stated. In this instance, the words literally imply that the second sign by itself would be more convincing than the first, and hence the drash proceeds to explain why this is so, referencing the fact that it was a punishment for Moshe speaking negatively about the people.[12]

This is a truly fascinating idea in the world of the concepts of pshat and drash, as the Be'er Yitzchak himself describes it: "כלל גדול בדרך הדרשות – a Major principle regarding drash expositions!"[13]

Concluding Thoughts: What Did Moshe Say Wrong?

The question that remains is: Why is Moshe considered to have spoken lashon hara about the Jewish people? As we

have seen, his concerns that people would not automatically believe him were perfectly legitimate and indeed corroborated by Hashem giving him signs to verify his status!

It appears that the answer lies in Moshe's opening word: "וַיֹּהֶן". This word simply appears to mean "And they [will not believe me]." However, if so, why does Moshe use the feminine form, and not the masculine form "וַיֹּהֶם"? In truth, the word "וַיֹּהֶן" has another meaning – it means "behold" or "indeed", and denotes emphasis and certainty. When Moshe said "וַיֹּהֶן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי", he was saying, "It is certain that they will not believe me." In this regard, Moshe was considered to have slandered the Jewish people, for even if he was entitled – and perhaps even required – to address the possibility that the people might not believe him, he was not entitled to assert that they would definitely not believe him.

Thus understanding is corroborated by a passage in the Midrash[14] regarding Moshe's final days, during which Hashem informed him, "הֵן קָרְבוּ יְמֵיךָ לְמוֹת" – Behold, your days are drawing near to die." [15] The Midrash states:

כך אמר משה, רבונו של עולם, ב'הן' קלסתיך שכן כתיב "הן לה" אלקיך השמים ושמי השמים, וב'הן' אתה גוזר עלי מיתה? אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא... אי אתה זוכר בשעה ששלחתיך לגאול אותם "ממצרים ואמרת לי "וַיֹּהֶן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי"?

So said Moshe: "Master of the universe, I praised You with the word "וַיֹּהֶן", as it says, 'Behold (וַיֹּהֶן), to Hashem, your God, are the heavens and the highest heavens,' and with the word "וַיֹּהֶן" You are decreeing death upon me? Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, to [Moshe]: "Do you not remember at the time I sent you to redeem them from Egypt that you said 'Behold (וַיֹּהֶן) they will not believe me'?"

With these words, Hashem was telling Moshe, "You may have been entitled to consider the possibility that they may not believe in you, but you were not entitled to not believe in them."

We may not be on Moshe's level where a single misplaced word can have such dire consequences, but we can, and should, certainly learn from this episode to our own lives in our dealings and interactions with our fellow Jews. As we regard others whose standards or sensitivities may be lacking in some respects, we can never consign them to such conduct or discount the possibility that they might change. They too, are children

of our Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and one never knows when their Jewish soul will shine through.

[1] Shemos 4:1.

[2] 3:18.

[3] See commentaries of Ibn Ezra and Ramban to our verse and Moreh Nevuchim sec. 1 chap. 63.

[4] Bereishis 16:2.

[5] Ibid. 21:11.

[6] Ibid. verse 12.

[7] Shemos 3:16.

[8] Based on Gur Aryeh and Malbim to our verse. See also Shemos 18:19 and 24.

[9] Shemos 4:8.

[10] It is amazing to consider that the Jewish people, who had by now been subjected to decades of systematic, nation-wide oppression, with their tormentors apparently free of any repercussions, were convinced by the fact that Moshe, who had merely spoken negatively about them, was punished for doing so. This means that, although sorely tried, their expectation of Divine justice had not been extinguished.

[11] Rashi actually explains that the first sign also contained elements of censure for Moshe over his negative comments concerning the people: Hashem informed him that he deserved to be struck by the staff in his hand for speaking ill of them, and the staff then turned into a snake, the archetypical symbol of lashon hara. It is interesting, therefore, that the response in the event that the people did not believe the first sign was to provide a second sign, the compelling factor of which would be the accompanying commentary of punishment for lashon hara, and not simply to provide the same commentary for the already existing first sign.

[12] For this reason, when it comes to the third sign of turning water into blood, Rashi does not discuss why that sign would be more convincing than the first two. Since Hashem did not say regarding the third sign, "If they don't believe the first two, they will believe this third one," it is understood that the contribution of this sign was purely corroborative, i.e. there being three signs instead of two (Be'er Yitzchak ibid.).

[13] Another classic illustration of this idea comes from Rashi's comments on various verses that mention peoples' hands, e.g. Yaakov sending gifts to Esav "from that which came to his hand" (Bereishis 32:14), or a lesson regarding Korach that came from "Moshe's hand"

(Bamidbar 17:5). Rashi first presents the pshat explanation, which in the former case means “from his domain,” and in the latter case is “through his agency.” However, he then adds the drash explanation which translates the word “hand” literally – in the first case referring to jewels that Yaakov gave Esav, and in the second case referring to Moshe’s actual hand which turned leprous when he spoke negatively about the Jewish people at the burning bush. Regarding this matter, it is fair to say that the drash has the “ability” to translate these words literally, since it has the option of explaining them in a way that does not rely on pshat context.

[14] Devarim Rabbah 9:6.

[15] Devarim 31:14.

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