



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Shemos 5782

### Reactions To The Yom Kippur War: Evaluations and Directions

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered January 12, 1974)

Last week, I discussed the “mood” in Israel, and reported that it was mixed: shock and sadness had replaced some of the old ebullience, and yet I found resolve, determination, and hope. There was a dejection, but no despair; they were concerned, but not hopeless.

Today I would like to offer pertinent information culled from the seminar that I attended in the House of the President, and sponsored by the Hebrew University. The participants, many of whom were distinguished scholars from all over the world, ranged over the entire spectrum of reactions. Obviously, they are too many to condense within one talk. I should like, this morning, to concentrate on the reactions of the intellectuals of the world and on the response of the American Jewish community, and see whether these can yield us any conclusions as to directions for the future.

A major concern of our Israel brothers was the attitude of the intellectuals. In many ways, this is a symptom of the traditional Jewish over-evaluation of men of the mind. Sir Isaiah Berlin reminded us that we ought not to worry too much about intellectuals, that they are not all that important in the world. But they do have a certain crucial significance. They are the teachers of the opinion-makers and politicians and diplomats and journalists of a few years hence. In that sense, they mold the opinions of the opinion-molders.

The Israelis were worried—as no doubt all of us were—by the silence of writers and artists and professors when Israel was brutally attacked on Yom Kippur. Why were these people, so articulate and obstreperous for every other cause, silent when it was Jews who were suffering?

Many reasons were offered for this strange silence. Many intellectuals are obsessed with the Third World, and seem to regard it as the incarnation of all virtue, and since

the Third World was solidly against Israel, they could not bring themselves to speak up for Israel. A number of other intellectuals, liberals that they are, are embarrassed by the fact that the vicious villain of Watergate proved to be a great hero for Israel. Yet others suffered from what has been called “battle fatigue” on Israel, from simply having expressed themselves too often and being worried too much in the past.

The most devastating explanation of all was: boredom. Many intellectuals found the whole subject a crashing bore, devoid of intellectual stimulation.

If that is so, it constitutes a major scandal, a shameful confusion of the intellectually titillating with the morally compelling. It tells us a great deal more about our intellectuals than it does about the State of Israel. There is not much we can do about it, save to recommend to the Israeli government that its Foreign Ministry appoint an attache in charge of academic entertainment.

Jewish intellectuals divided into two groups. There were many who were very active for Israel, indeed much more active than in the past. But some, and a not insignificant number, were opposed to Israel.

These were, to a large extent, those intellectuals who questioned the justice of Israel’s cause, who felt that it was too rigid and perhaps imperialist. Of course, everyone has a right to question the rightness of Israel’s position. In an era when very little is sacred, one cannot deny to Jewish intellectuals the right to keep their distance from Israel, even when it is obviously in the right—as in this instance of an unprovoked Yom Kippur aggression.

I suppose there is no way to satisfy some people. These Third-World-oriented Jewish intellectuals, at least some of them, were against Israel after the Six Day War because Israel won. One would think that they would be pro-Israel

now that Israel has suffered. But no, Israel does not come out well either way. One understands now what the late Prime Minister Levi Eshkol once said. When Minister Shimon Peres was appointed by Eshkol to go to the United States after the Six Day War, he asked the Prime Minister what posture he should adopt to the American public. Eshkol told him: present us like a *געבעעכעל שמשון*, like a pitiful Samson....

But personally, I will not give up on them. Many of these alienated intellectuals will not come back, not ever—not if they abandoned us in this time of need. But many of them will come back, after experience and history will have again proven the emptiness of their words and the vacuity of their position.

In our Sidra this morning we read the astounding news that Moses forgot to circumcise one of his two sons, and that the Lord wished to kill him for this, but that his wife Tzipora circumcised the child and saved the family in the last minute.

How does one explain this amazing lapse? The Rabbis solved this difficult problem with a solution that proves even more difficult, more strange, and more bizarre! The Mekhilta tells us that when Moses first came to they come of Jethro and wanted to marry Tzipora,

אמר לו יתרו למשה קבל עליך דבר זה שאומר לך ואני נותנה לך לאשה. אמר לו מה הוא. אמר לו בן שיהיה לך תחילה יהיה לעז מכאן ואילך לשם שמים. וקיבל עליו.

Jethro said to Moses: “Promise me this one thing and I will give you my daughter for a wife.” Said Moses, “What is that?” Jethro answered: “Your first son must be dedicated to the worship of Idols; thereafter your children may be worshippers of one God.” And Moses accepted and made the promise.

That is how the Rabbis explain why Moses’ oldest son, Gershon, was not circumcised by his father, but had to await his mother’s precipitate action.

Truly, this is shocking. There is nothing in the life or ideas of Moses as they unfold from the Bible itself that can possibly support the theory of such a promise by the greatest figure in Judaism. I feel inclined to accept the suggestion by Hasidic master, author of the *חידושי* הר”ם: Moses never intended to yield any of his children to idolatry. Instead Jethro said to Moses: you have been a worshipper of the one God all along, and that is how you attained your greatness. But is it not just as well that your son first test other beliefs, first experience other systems

and faiths and then, disappointed in them, arrive firmly at the belief in one God? Moses agreed to this. There is something to be said for that point of view. He probably suspected that Jethro himself, who had changed religions often, would eventually become a monotheist. Therefore, let the first son recapitulate the adventure of the life of his grandfather Jethro. Moses agreed to this, so that one son would come to Judaism from his very cradle, and the other would arrive at it after a long journey. Perhaps, Moses thought, this first son who would first be exposed to the falsehood and moral ugliness of all paganisms, would then learn to appreciate Judaism all the more. (One hears an echo of contemporary parents who fear that a yeshiva education is too “parochial” and confining...)

The agreement of Moses now becomes more comprehensible, but it is still wrong. *ויבקש ה' להמיתו*, he deserved to be punished for it. If not for the action of his wife Tzipora, his decision would have proved tragic.

Moses’ theory was erroneous. But a theory of Moses is worth something even if it is fallacious and discredited.

So, I am optimistic about those, especially those intellectual Jews, who are flirting with all kinds of strange loyalties. Many of those intellectuals who are even today remote from us—to use the Biblical metaphor, *ערלי לב*, uncircumcised of heart—and who worship at the altars of the Third World and other popular ideological icons, will yet come back! Only after their current fads will have disappointed them grievously, will they appreciate what they had rejected. It is not the most desirable path, but it is viable.

American Jews in general underwent a polarization as a result of the Yom Kippur War. The process we had noticed in religious life all along has now become more evident in American Jewry’s relation to Israel. Those who were for Israel, loyal to it, have now—after the Yom Kippur War—become even more committed than after the Six Day War. Those who were indifferent, remain more intensively indifferent. And those who were opposed to Israel, are now even more hostile.

Normally, un-Jewish Jews seem to come back home as a result of anti-Semitism. This time, because of fears that the energy crisis would lead to widespread anti-Semitism problems, such Jews reacted against Israel and their own Jewish background. They felt that they were faced with a choice between the welfare of American Jewry and all it had produced and built, and the safety of Israel, and

their decision was that “our” security comes first. Of course, this presentation of alternatives is thoroughly inauthentic, because Israel and American Jewry are totally interdependent. But they made a decisive choice, unnecessary though it was. To me, it is a paranoid internal reflection of the “dual loyalty” problem—and it is a dreadful, grievous, and tragic choice.

The indifferent did nothing, although in their hearts there was sympathy for Israel. These are the new “Jews of Silence.” Of such moral cowardice one can say little that is appropriate to the pulpit.

But the most important feature of the reaction of American Jewry was its overwhelming support, unprecedented in history. Committed Jews proved themselves to be even more loyal, they performed spectacularly, and this is something of which we may be proud. The fact that the truly committed segment of American Jewry is not its majority, is not a happy one, but we must remember that it is rarely the majority of the community that moves.

The analysis of this marvelous response yields three important conclusions for the future.

First, the importance of organization. At the Yom Kippur War, American Jewry had already the making of a coordinated system, which it had learned after the Six Day War. American Jewry put this organization into immediate and effective use.

After years of sarcasm about Jewish organizations—and everyone has suffered from this, and from the conquest neglect, from Zionist organizations to sisterhoods to communal institutions—organizations proved their mettle and their worth.

Incidentally, the synagogues too proved their importance. Apparently, at every moment of crisis, whether dealing with Israel or even with America itself, the first place committed Jews repair to, in times of crisis, is the synagogue.

The second lesson is the importance of personal experience with Israel. Those who had visited Israel as tourists, or had spent a bit of time studying there, were the ones most easy to involve. Especially important is aliyah, for those who had relatives in Israel who were emigrants, felt most deeply involved. It is hard to feel remote when your own relatives are threatened, as they were during this war.

I wish to add only this: some of us, committed Jews, are

also afflicted with more than a bit of fear or cowardice to deter you from doing your duty to Israel. I refer specifically to tourism. Too many people I have spoken to act as if the remote possibility of danger is sufficient to discourage them at this time. Heaven forbid! When we American Jews needed encouragement all these past 25 years, we went to Israel to draw upon their reservoir of courage and confidence and bravery. Now it is our task to bring them a smile, a comforting word. Do not worry: any risk is minimal, and that iota of danger is both negligible and always worth it!

When Moses and Aaron went on their first diplomatic mission to Pharaoh, we read that they consulted with the זקנים, the elders. ואחר באו משה ואהרן, and afterwards Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh. Where were the elders? A tradition, quoted by Rashi, gives us the answer:

אבל הזקנים נשמטו אחד אחד מאחר משה ואהרן עד שנשמטו כולם קודם שהגיעו לפלסין לפי שיראו ללכת.

The word “ואחר” means not “afterwards,” but “behind.” The elders, to use a contemporary phrase, “chickened out.” They became apprehensive, and each one in turn slipped away from behind Moses and Aaron who alone made their way to the palace to confront the mighty Pharaoh.

But in the end, when the Israelites came to Sinai to experience the great reward of Revelation, only Moses ascended the mountain by himself, and the elders were not permitted to accompany him. Moses turned them back. He turned his back to them. Those who were afraid to brave danger when it came to a moment of crisis, they do not deserve to receive the reward that God will bring to his people.

I hope that the message is clear.

So the conclusion is that tourism and studying and aliyah must be encouraged if only to retain the loyalties of American Jews.

Finally, the most important element of all is education. Formal education proved to be the sure way to commitment, and from commitment to work for Israel. The best response came from the best educated. Easiest to rally were those whose Jewish education had prepared them for it. Also informal education, such as that which is fortunately now being offered to such groups as the UJA leadership, and the Welfare Fund leadership, proved worthwhile.

A beautiful phenomenon was something which I experienced in this synagogue, and which those who

prepared the reports found all over the country as well, and that is that Jews, so often raised with the idea that they can fulfill all their commitments by writing a check for Israel (the contemporary version of “The People of the Book”--the checkbook), kept on asking: “what else, what more, can I do for Israel besides giving money?”

That is a healthy sign. It shows a degree of spiritual perception that goes far beyond the merely philanthropic.

The answer, of course, is that in crisis, such as the Yom Kippur War crisis, there is little more that one is able to do at such a time. The time to do things is now, before any new crises erupt. And what can be done? What can be done is to build a Jewish home, enforce Jewish love, deepen Jewish loyalty, make sure that Jewish education is not only skin deep, and encourage Jewish commitment.

It is that kind of program that will keep us as a viable community and fully interdependent with Israel.

It is that kind of program that will make us conscientious Jews.

It is that kind of program that will sensitize and prepare our young and teach them how to answer our most vicious

critics. So that when a Bruno Kreisky suggests that the concept of chosenness, of עם סגולה, is what is making us unpopular; when this Austrian meshumad tells us to forgo our belief that we are a chosen people in order to win friends--presumably the friendship of the sorts of his country--our answer will be a resounding “No!” We are davka a chosen people, a people of Torah and commandments. We are a different people. We are not like those who submit obsequiously to the blackmail of terrorists. We are ashamed that the likes of Bruno Kreisky come from us. But we are proud to be a separate people, and never want to be like his country, which was ready to close down refugee centers, and to abandon human beings fleeing from persecution.

With continued organization, with more personal experience of Israel, with a deepened Jewish education, we will grow in our commitment.

And with it will grow, too, our faith and our hope and our confidence that הנה לא ינום ולא ישן שומר ישראל that the Guardian of Israel neither sleeps nor slumbers.

*Read more at [www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage](http://www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage).*

## Riding High

*Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l*

**M**oshe, after receiving permission from his father-in-law Yisro to take leave of his home in Midian, takes his wife and children with him and heads for Egypt, to fulfill his divine mission. The Torah tells us that he took his wife and children and ‘mounted them on the donkey’ (Shemos 4:20). Rashi, noting the reference to the donkey, written with a ‘heh hayediah’, cites the midrash as saying it was a special donkey, the same one that Avrohom used on his way to the akeidah, and the same one that the moshiach will appear on in the future. What is the common denominator among these three historical occurrences? Maharal of Prague, in his super-commentary to Rashi, Gur Aryeh, and, at greater length, in his work *Gevuros Hashem*, chapter 29, explains that all three of these individuals were elevated above the mundane, and this was symbolized by riding atop a donkey. The riding itself, he says, is an indication of their elevation, and, moreover, the donkey - chamor in Hebrew, similar to the word chomer, meaning material - represents the animal most representative of the material side of the world. Maharal proceeds to discuss the special nature of

the material aspect of the world represented by the donkey, but space does not permit a presentation of that aspect of his presentation. These three Biblical characters, then, argues the Maharal, were all elevated above the merely physical. This explanation, however, does not account for the significance of the specific times in which these three characters demonstrated their elevation above others.

Reb Zadok HaKohein of Lublin, in his commentary *Peri Tzadik*, offers a somewhat different explanation. He also says that the donkey represents the physical, or, more specifically, the evil inclination. In all three cases, the characters mentioned as riding on the donkey were harnessing the physical and the evil inclination in order to attain holiness. Thus, when Avrohom went to offer his son as a sacrifice, following God’s bidding, he overcame the objections of the evil inclination trying to prevent him from carrying out this act. Moshe, on his way to Egypt, wanted to make sure that his wife and children would participate in the giving of the Torah, and therefore wanted to train them in overcoming the evil inclination. The moshiach, at the end of time, will teach the Jewish people



to overcome the evil inclination, and actually eradicate it. I would like to offer a variation of Reb Zadok's explanation, based on the teachings of Rav Kook.

Rav Kook writes that one of the purposes of the akeidah was to infuse enthusiasm into Avrohom's service of God. Idolaters are full of excitement when they perform their service, because what they basically do is worship forces within themselves. They thus utilize their evil inclination for bad purposes. When Avrohom introduced the belief in the one God, who is both transcendent and imminent, that feeling of proximity and consequent enthusiasm in worship was lowered. Through the akeidah, and Avrohom's enthusiasm and alacrity in fulfilling God's command to bring his son to the mountain, this element was introduced into the worship of the one God. Thus, through the akeidah, Avrohom used the enthusiasm of the evil inclination for a positive goal (see Netvort to Chayei Soroh, 5763, available at [Torahheights.com](http://Torahheights.com), for more on this topic).

Moshe, as he prepared to go to Egypt, wanted to do the same thing that Avrohom did through the akeidah. The rabbis tell us that the mitzvoh of re-telling the story of the Exodus must be done in a way that begins with the degraded state of the nation and ends with its elevated state. There are two opinions regarding what constituted the degraded state. One opinion is that it was the nation's state of slavery, and the other opinion is that it was the

nation's worship of idolatry. What is the purpose of re-telling the story in this way? Rav Kook explained that we need to recognize that the degraded state actually helped generate the elevated state. In regard to the opinion that the degraded state was that of slavery, we can understand that becoming habituated to doing service to a human being could prepare the people to transfer that service to God. However, in what way could the worship of idols serve a positive purpose? Here, again, Rav Kook explains that the enthusiasm used to serve idols was later transferred to the service of God. Thus, when Moshe mounted his wife and children onto the donkey to take them with him to Egypt, he was, in a symbolic way, preparing to infuse the nation with enthusiasm in their eventual service of God. Coming from the house of Yisro, who had originally worshipped idols and then rejected them, Moshe was in a unique position to accomplish this goal.

We mentioned above that, according to Reb Zadok, that one of the tasks of moshiach will be to eradicate the evil inclination. Perhaps, following our application of Rav Kook's ideas, we can explain that by using the enthusiasm displayed by the evil inclination for doing evil in a positive way, to serve God with enthusiasm, the evil aspect has been transformed, and, thus, in a sense, eradicated. Thus, the chamor, that was symbolically ridden by Avrohom and Moshe, will, ultimately, be used by the moshiach as he leads the Jewish people to their final redemption.

## The Humility of a Leader

*Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Jan 19, 2017)*

Probably the most difficult pasuk—from a *peshat* perspective—in this week's Parsha, is when Moshe asks Hashem: *Mi anochi ki eileich el Paroah ve-chi otzi es Bnei Yisroel mi-Mitzrayim?* Who am I to go to tell Paroah to take Bnei Yisroel out from Mitzrayim? Hashem answers him: *Ki E'heye imach*—I will be with you, which seems like a very proper answer to Moshe's question. Because if Hashem is with you, you are *kedai*. And then Hashem adds a sign—*ve-ze lecha ha-os ki Anochi shelachticha*. This is a sign that I sent you. *Be-hotzi'acha es ha-aam mi-Mitzrayim ta'avdun es ha-Elokim al ha-har ha-zeh*—when you take the Jews out of Mitzrayim, you will worship Hashem on this mountain. He was talking about har Sinai, of course—and this came true at the time

of Matan Torah. And all the meforshim have a problem: What was the sign that Hashem mentioned—*ha-os ki Anochi shelachticha*—? *Al pi pshat*, you cannot say that Hashem was referring to them worshipping on har Sinai when they come out of Mitzrayim—because that would not happen until afterward. Moshe would need a sign beforehand to give him the confidence needed to complete his mission. And *ki E'heye imach* could not be the sign. How would Moshe know that Hashem is with him? Some of the numerous mefarshim who discuss this question say that Matan Torah is the sign, but for something else. Rashi says that something else is a sign for Matan Torah. But many meforshim assume that *ve-ze lecha ha-os ki Anochi shelachticha* means exactly that. This is a sign for

you that I am sending you—that you are a real shaliach of Hashem. But what is the sign? So, Rashi says in his simpler interpretation—and perhaps this is the simplest *pshuto shel mikra*—the burning bush is the sign. The *sne bo'er ba-eish* is the sign that I sent you. Because, after all, it's a miracle. It is burning and not consumed. That shows that I am with you, says Hashem. Not only that, but the burning bush also represents the ratzon of Hashem because it remains intact, even though it's on fire. In the same way, when you go into a dangerous situation in Mitzrayim, you will come out unharmed. However, Ohr Ha-Chayim ha-Kadosh, and several Ba'alei Drush, give another pshat in this. *Zeh lecha os*. What's the sign? Ohr Ha-Chayim ha-Kadosh says—The fact that you said: Who am i to go to Paroah? And why am i deserving? I am not great enough for this. *Zeh lecha os ki Anochi shelachticha*. That's the sign that you are a real shaliach of Hashem. If someone comes and says: I am speaking for G-d! or I am speaking for Torah! is he a real shaliach of Hashem? The answer is: If someone comes and says, I am so Great because I am speaking for Hashem or I am so Great because I deserve to be a shaliach of Hashem, that is a sure sign that this person is not a true shaliach for Hashem. That's a sign that they are really in it for themselves. If someone recognizes that they are nothing—*mi anochi*? If someone sincerely believes i am not *kedai*. When they are not in it for themselves. When they don't care for their *kavod*. That's an authentic sign that *Anochi shelachticha*—that they are a true shaliach of Hashem. Ohr Ha-Chayim ha-Kadosh even points out the connection of this idea to *ta'avdod es Elokim al ha-har ha-zeh*. Why was Matan Torah *davka*

on har Sinai? The Midrash says: Hashem chose har Sinai because it was the lowest and the least impressive of all the candidate mountains. The Shechina rests only in the place of humility—only on those people who don't think that they are the greatest in the world. Likewise, that's also why Hashem revealed Himself to Moshe from a thornbush, which is the lowest of the bushes. Hashem says: Do you want to know the real sign of shelichus of Hashem? The real shelichus of Hashem is when the person doesn't ask for *kavod*, doesn't think a lot of themselves, and is really doing it *li-shma*.

There is a well-known question: How could Moshe have been an *anav mi-kol adam* while he was the greatest Navi? Moshe wasn't stupid. He knew that he was the greatest Navi ever. Yet how could Moshe have been *anav mi-kol adam* at the same time? There are many famous answers of the Ba'alei Mussar, and each of them is a gem! One of them is: Moshe wasn't *anav mi-kol adam* because he thought of himself any less than who he actually was. He knew exactly who he was. However, he talked to Hashem. When you stand in the presence of Hashem, and you realize how great Hashem is, then no matter how great you are, you will realize that you are nothing compared to Hashem. And someone who is really thinking about Hashem—a real *shaliach* of Hashem—knows that they are nothing. Who am i? Who are any of us compared to Hashem? So, when you go out there into the world, and you want to know who the real *shaliach* of Hashem is—it is someone who sincerely says: *mi anochi*? That's an *os, ki Anochi shelachticha*.

## The “Decision”

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

**T**he birth of Moshe represents a turning point of the Jewish saga in Egypt. This would-be savior 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 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’ 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.

# The Eternal Model of Leadership

Rabbi Josh Blass

One of the predominant themes of 2020 both in the U.S and in Eretz Yisroel was the question of leadership. Who is most fit to lead? What are the characteristics that we seek in choosing a leader? Which factors should be prioritized, and which are secondary and not given full heed? While what has been front and center in our consciousness are the elections for President and Prime Minister, leadership is in fact needed in every institution, community, and family. The question is one of all importance. What qualities mark a person - President, spiritual leader, boss, or parent - as someone who is best suited to lead?

More ink has been spent on this topic than one can shake a proverbial stick at, but for us one needs to look no further than the handful of pesukim that describe the ascension of Moshe Rabbeinu to the role of the unquestioned leader of the Jewish people both in his epoch and in any epoch since. We know so little about his early life so the few 'crumbs' that we are provided with are seized upon with great relish.

Let us mention a few well known sources that paint the picture. The first time we have any exposure to the grown Moshe, the Torah records that:

וַיְהִי בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אָחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסַבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם מַכֵּה אִישׁ עִבְרִי מֵאָחָיו:

*Sometime after that, when Moses had grown up, he went out to his brethren and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brethren. (Shmos 2:11)*

Rashi, quoting the Medrash, highlights that the word וירא is not some simple act of seeing. Rather:

וירא בסבלתם. נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מצר עליהם

*And he saw their burdens: he set his eyes and mind to share in their distress.*

This is an act described by the ba'alei Mussar as *ha'aras panim* - completely seeing and empathizing with another person.

What happens after he sees this Egyptian striking his fellow Jew?

וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיֵּד אֶת הַמִּצְרַיִם וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל:

These words 'and he saw that there was no man' have been a source of debate for the last millennia. Famously Rashi said that it means that Moshe 'saw' that no Jew would ever emanate from this Mitzri in the future. The Netziv said that what it means is that Moshe saw that there

was no one to appeal to on behalf of this besieged-upon Jew. There was no one to turn to who would adjudicate the issue fairly.

The Ramban took a simpler and I believe a more resonant approach and said that:

והנה נסתכל בסבלותם ועמלם ולא יכול לסבול ולכן הרג המצרי המכה הנלחץ:

Moshe saw their suffering and saw that there was no one else to jump into the fray. With that middah of empathy and inability to tolerate cruelty he stood up and smote the Mitzri.

As we continue along Moshe's journey this theme continues to emerge -namely Moshe's inability to watch oppression and not in some way to get involved. Whether it was his desire to break up the conflict between the two Jews in Mitzraim or in his advocacy for the daughters of Yisro in Midian, Moshe was simply unable to watch cruelty from the sidelines. This middah blends seamlessly into his chosen profession upon arriving in Midian - that of a shepherd.

The Be'er Mayim Chaim in quoting the famous Medrash says the following:

ומשה היה רועה את צאן יתרו חותנו וגו'. הודיע הכתוב מאין זכה משה להיות הוא השליח לישראל והוא אשר יוציאם ויביאם, לרעות את עם ה', והוא לאשר היה רועה נאמן בצאן חותנו ברחמים מרובים כמאמר חז"ל (שמות רבה ב', ב') שפעם אחת ברח ממנו גדי אחד ורץ אחריו וכו' נודמנה לו בריכה של מים ועמד הגדי לשתות כיון שהגיע משה אצלו אמר אני לא הייתי יודע שרץ היית מפני הצמא עיף אתה הרכיבו על כתיפו והוא מהלך אמר הקב"ה יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם כך, חיך אתה תרעה את צאני וכו', עד כאן. הרי שמשם זכה לרעות כצאן עמו.

While the entire Medrash is beyond beautiful and paints the exact picture that allows one to understand who Moshe Rabbeinu was, the key concept is that Moshe was chosen to be the future leader of G-d's people because of the care and empathy that he demonstrated towards the gentlest and most helpless of creations. The line is worth repeating in that it describes the precise Jewish ethic that informs not just appropriate leadership but general behavior and outlook –

אמר הקב"ה יש לך רחמים לנהוג צאנו של בשר ודם כך, חיך אתה תרעה את צאני וכו', עד כאן. הרי שמשם זכה לרעות כצאן עמו.

Lastly, one reflects on the choice of a thornbush as the vehicle of revelation to Moshe Rabbeinu. This was



the beginning of the grandest moment in Jewish History and it began in the most inauspicious of places. The medrash records a number of reasons for this choice. One explanation that has always caught my eye was in the Mechilta:

ד"א למה מתוך הסנה ר' אלעזר בן ערך אומר מפני מה נגלה הקב"ה משמי מרום והיה מדבר עם משה מתוך הסנה לפי שיכול המקום שידבר מראש הרים ומראש הגבעות מגבהי עולם ומארוזי לבנון אלא השפיל עצמו ודבר מתוך הסנה ועליו אמר שלמה (משלי כ"ט כ"ג) ושפל רוח יתמוך כבוד: אי אתה מוצא מן האילנות שפל מן הסנה וכן הוא אומר (תהלים קל"ח ו') כי רם ד' ושפל יראה.

HKB'H could have spoken from anywhere and from any vehicle. The choice of the thornbush was a way of communicating the necessity of humility in whoever is chosen to lead the people. This is a theme that will be revisited throughout the Torah - Moshe's humility as a prerequisite for leadership.

While there is no shortage of other themes that are required in a leader and that Moshe himself demonstrated - integrity, strength of character, unafraid to make unpopular decisions, honesty etc. the initial point of emphasis is empathy and humility, kindness and ego-restraint.

Why are these the middos most emphasized in Moshe Rabbeinu and in arguably all future Jewish leaders? On a simple level the answer is obvious. A leader who is not empathetic and who is led by his own ego-driven needs eventually uses his power to serve his own ends and for his own self-aggrandizement. But it is really more than that. Effective leadership is when there is complete identification between a leader and his people. An entity be it a family or a country is an organism in which the leader plays a primary role but is at the same time completely integrated into that whole. There is a love and an identification felt by the leader for his people which is in turn reciprocated by the people's feelings for the leader. That can only happen with empathy, with respect for the entire populace and with a genuine spirit of humility. Most importantly, the leaders who cultivate that spirit and that identification truly elevate the national character.

Clearly Moshe Rabbeinu understood and cultivated this unique, empathetic, and respectful relationship between the leader and the עם. The Ramban (Bamidbar 16:1) points out that Korach's rebellion could have only taken place after the sin of the spies once the national mood had been dampened, because prior to that the nation loved Moshe in the way that a child loves a mother and could not have fathomed rebelling against him. Furthermore, the Ramban

(Bamidbar 1:1) notes that one of the purposes of doing a census was so that Moshe Rabbeinu could personally interact with every member of Am Yisroel.

At some point seemingly the feeling of complete identification between Moshe and the nation became threatened. The Rambam (in Hilchos Dei'os and in Shemoneh Perakim) claims that Moshe's sin at mei merivah was that he angrily rebuked the people - שמעו נא - *listen to me you rebellious ones*. When it became clear that even Moshe had reached his limit and that his ability to empathetically elevate the nation had perhaps run its course then HKB'H decided that a change in leadership was necessary.

A particularly profound line in Berachos 28a always struck me as underscoring this dynamic between a leader and his/her subjects. The gemarah records how the Nasi Rabban Gamliel had entered into a public dispute with R' Yehoshua and how Rabban Gamliel had embarrassed his talmudic adversary. When Rabban Gamliel, who came from wealthy nobility, entered into Rebbe Yehoshua's somewhat dilapidated home to ask him for forgiveness, Rabban Gamliel made a comment that indicated that he wasn't really aware of the type of life choices that someone of Rebbe Yehoshua's economic status was forced to make. Rebbe Yehoshua responds sharply that

אוי לו לדור שאֲתָהּ פִּרְנָסוֹ, שְׂאֵי אֲתָהּ יוֹדֵעַ בְּצַעֲרָן שֶׁל תַּלְמִידֵי חֻקָּמִים, בְּמָה הֵם מִתְפַּרְנְסִים וּבְמָה הֵם נֹזְזִים.

Essentially saying that woe onto this generation that you have been entrusted to lead for you have no true understanding of the struggles of the people.

Rav Kook on that gemara expresses the following beautiful formulation

הנהגת הדור הראויה צריכה להיות שהמנהיג ישתדל לדחור למצבו של כל יחיד לפי כחו. ובמה שישתדל לתקן גם כן כל המצבים הפרטיים יתרומם מצב הכלל כולו.

A leader may have many qualities but first and foremost does he love, empathize with, deeply understand, and fully respect the totality of the people who he serves? If not, then אוי לו לדור שאֲתָהּ פִּרְנָסוֹ.

As the gemara forcefully notes:

תנו רבנן שלשה הקב"ה בוכה עליהן בכל יום על שאפשר לעסוק בתורה ואינו עוסק ועל שאי אפשר לעסוק בתורה ועוסק ועל פרנס המתגאה על הצבור

HKB'H cries daily when he sees a *parnes* (a leader) lordling over the community (Chagigah 5b)

Even leaving aside the countless models in Tanach and from Chazal, we as Americans and as Jews have been

blessed to witness many leaders who reflect what I believe to be the Torah's vision of leadership. Abraham Lincoln might be the greatest example of such a person but there have been many others. Men and women of decency and idealism who were completely connected to the nation and to the people who they served and who, because of that identification, were able to elevate the entire national consciousness. David Ben Gurion and Menachem Begun were flawed human beings but at the same time they were genuinely great men who brought out the best, most noble and most selfless spirit in their countrymen. None of these people, G-d forbid, can be compared to Moshe Rabbeinu but in their ability to identify with, be identified with, and passionately elevate the people they found similarities with the greatest of our leaders.

It is just my humble opinion but to unapologetically, unabashedly, and loudly support candidates who fly in the face of the Torah's eternal values of empathy, humility, nobility, and integrity seems like an inadvertent sidelining and disgrace of the Torah. The unintended message would

## Purposeful Labor, Life Satisfaction

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

**S** efer Shemos/Sefer ha'Geula, Parshas Shemos 5782. *Baruch she'he'chyanu v'ki'yimanu v'hi'gi'yanu la'zman ha'zeh...* וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, הַבָּאִים, מִצְרַיִם: אֵת יַעֲקֹב, וְאֵת יְעֶזְבֵּן... *and these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt; Yaakov, each man and his household came* (Shemos 1:1). With these words, the book of Redemption begins.

The curtain has closed on the lives of our Avos and Imahos, and with the death of Yosef and all of his brothers (Shemos 1:6), the Torah narrative moves to our experiences in Egypt.

In the first chapter of Shemos we learn of the Shibud Mitzrayim, the bitter and painful enslavement of the Israelites by their Egyptian tormentors. When a new king arose אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף (1:8), the program of propaganda, segregation, discrimination, tax oppression, slave labor and finally, infanticide, is set into motion. It is only after hundreds of years in Egypt that the redeemer, Moshe Rabbeinu, will lead the Israelites to freedom.

In regard to the forced slave labor, the pasuk tells us: וַיִּבְנוּ וְאֶת-רַעְמֵסֵס עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת, לְפָרְעֹה אֶת-פְּתָחַם, וְאֶת-רַעְמֵסֵס

seem to be that the domain of the Torah exists only in some black and white area of halakha as opposed to being a Toras Chaim that informs every piece of our lives. Very simply, if we believe in decency, derech eretz, empathy, respect, humility, kavod habrios etc. than taking public positions that fly in the face of those most essential of values seems to me to be a desecration of the HKB'H's Torah that promotes those values.

The hope is that leadership, be it in communities, shuls, schools and in the government continues to attract and inspire the best and the brightest. While great men and women such as Moshe Rabbeinu, Dvorah HaNeviah, Dovid HaMelech and Yoshiyahu HaMelech all approached leadership with a certain healthy ambivalence, eventually they heard the call to service and brought both their great strength and their great decency to bear in the service of Am Yisroel.

Let us hope that that is a model that we continue to see and support for the betterment of our people and of humankind.

*built storage cities for Pharaoh: Pisom and Ramses (1:11).*

Rashi (quoting the Sages) teaches:

את פתם ואת רעמסס. שלא היו ראויים מתחלה לכך, ועשאום חזקות ובצורות לאוצר

At first, they were not fit for this purpose (i.e., storage), and Israel made them strong and fortified for storage.

However, the Gemara offers us a deep insight into the actual names of these storage cities that the Israelite slaves were forced to build. The Gemara (Sotah 11a) teaches:

את פיתום ואת רעמסס: רב ושמואל. חד אמר פיתום שמה, ולמה נקרא שמה רעמסס? שראשון ראשון מתרוסס. וחד אמר רעמסס שמה, ולמה נקרא שמה פיתום? שראשון ראשון פי תהום בולעו.

*[They were forced to build] Pisom and Ramses. Rav and Shmuel disagree [while both assume that only one city was built, which had primary and secondary names]. One says that Pisom was its real name, and why was it called Ramses? [It is an appellation indicating that as the buildings were constructed] they collapsed [mitroses] one by one and needed to be rebuilt. And one says that Ramses was its real name, and why was it called Pisom? Because the opening of the abyss [pi tehom] swallowed each building they constructed one by one, and it sunk into the ground.*

What lessons can be derived from this teaching of Chazal, which indicates that any work the slaves did was quickly destroyed - either by being swallowed up or by collapsing - and needed to be rebuilt all over again? Why didn't Pharaoh want the slaves building long-lasting sturdy structures on firm soil, to serve him and his countrymen?

R' Shlomo Zalman Bregman, in his *Short and Sweet on the Parsha* writes, "The answer is that it was crucial to the Egyptians that the slaves find no taste, no meaning, and no progress in their lives whatsoever. Even if a person is enslaved, he can at least feel some satisfaction by seeing the toil of his hands endure. Pharaoh and the Egyptians wished to deny the slaves even this little bit of satisfaction from their labor..."

"There is a very important lesson to be gleaned from here, beyond the historical reason for the names of these cities. A person needs to feel progress and accomplishment in life, or he will feel almost as though he is dying. Absence of progress leads to feelings of deep dissatisfaction. If a Jew isn't learning and growing, he will feel unsatisfied and frustrated. There will always be a feeling that something is amiss. This is because a life without forward progress isn't a life at all!" (*Short and Sweet on the Parsha*, Feldheim, p.133).

This is a beautiful and relevant lesson for us all. No matter what it is that a person works on, or works towards, it is of vital importance that a sense of satisfaction is derived from one's endeavors. One must see the fruits of his toil to recognize progress and growth in life. This is true in both the physical realm and the spiritual realm. Whether we are toiling in 'labor of the field', or in *ameilus ba'Torah*, one must always feel that he is erecting a sound

## The Anti-Leader

*Rabbi Adam Friedmann*

**T**he book of Shemot marks the beginning of G-d's relationship not with individual Jews, but with the Jewish nation as a whole. This kind of interaction called for a new type of personality: a messenger-prophet who would communicate G-d's will to the people. The Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 2:39) argues that while there were prophets before Moshe, none of them was ever told to relay a commandment to other people. G-d communicated ethical ideals to the prophets and if other people followed them, it was because they were successfully convinced.

structure, while building himself even greater, higher and stronger.

Moreover, R' Bregman writes, "On a related note, have you ever wondered why at the Pesach seder, romaine lettuce is considered to be the ideal bitter herb for *marror* (see *Pesachim* 39a)? We might imagine that we can readily find something even more bitter to eat! Perhaps horseradish [would be preferred, for its sharp and bitter taste]!"

"Some commentaries explain that romaine lettuce is the ideal bitter herb specifically because it has no taste. This makes it more ideal for recalling the Egyptian enslavement than something highly bitter to the taste. How so? The Egyptians wanted us to have a life without 'taste,' as we described above, regarding the disappearing and futile storage cities of Pisom and Ramses. Moreover, Chazal also relate that Pharaoh ordered that the enslaved Jewish men perform the work of women, and that the women perform the work of men. All of this was done to ensure that the slaves would derive no satisfaction from their work whatsoever" (*Short and Sweet on the Parsha*, Feldheim, p.133-134).

A life without purpose and meaning, a life without growth and success, a life without seeing the fruits of our labor, is a 'tasteless', most bitter life indeed. Hence, romaine lettuce is the perfect bitter herb for *marror* on *leil ha'Seder*. Even worse than tasting the bitterness of life, is tasting nothing in life at all! Only when we work towards a goal, and can measure our accomplishments in that realm - even if they may be small, may they be steady! - only then will we feel fulfilled, satisfied, complete and redeemed.

Only through Moshe Rabbeinu, a special kind of prophetic leader, did G-d begin to communicate *mitzvot*.

What was it about Moshe's personality that suited him to this role?

Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (*Commentary to Shemot* 2:12, 3:1213) argues that there was a fundamental tension in Moshe's personality between a radical commitment to justice and truth, and an aversion to public life, that made him the perfect candidate for prophet.

We encounter Moshe's commitment to justice

throughout this parshah. His first act was to save a Jewish slave from his Egyptian slavemaster. He saved the daughters of Yitro at the well. The parshah ends with Moshe arguing with G-d on behalf of the Jews; he asked why their situation had gotten worse since he was sent to remove them from slavery. Moshe's bravery in these actions was staggering. He was willing to risk his reputation, put his life in danger, and even face G-d Himself in the pursuit of justice.

At the same time, Moshe completely lacked the drive to take his place at the head of a group and lead. He actively sought to avoid public exposure of his deeds, and so his eventual rise was clearly Divine.

We may see this from Moshe's first act with the Egyptian, where he carefully checked to see if anyone was looking before making a move. But the clearest example of this is Moshe's obstinate refusal to become G-d's messenger, and, by extension, the leader of the Jews. Ultimately, G-d Himself testified to Moshe's unsurpassed humility. (Bamidbar 12:3)

Moshe's personality thus combined a relentless drive to do good and help others, especially his own people, and complete avoidance of engaging in public life. These features are encapsulated by a midrash (Shemot Rabbah 1:26) that explains how Moshe developed his speech impediment: Pharaoh's soothsayers were worried that Moshe might be the leader they predicted would usurp Pharaoh's crown. They advised Pharaoh to kill him. Yitro

argued that Moshe was unintelligent, and proposed a test that would prove this. Moshe was presented with two bowls, one filled with gold and the other with burning coals. Choosing the gold would indicate that he desired wealth and power and would be a danger to Pharaoh. Choosing the coals would prove that he didn't know what was good for him, as Yitro had argued. Moshe initially reached for the gold, until the angel Gabriel pushed his hand into the coals. Placing his burning hand into his mouth to cool it down, Moshe injured himself, which resulted in his speech impediment.

In fact, choosing the coals was not a sign of foolishness. The coals symbolize Moshe's personality. Gold is a substance that presents its luster and great worth to the world. Coals are the opposite: on the outside they are dull and gray, and their powerful fire is concealed beneath the surface. This dichotomy manifested physically in Moshe's speech impediment. The most important messages ever communicated were to be presented by a man who physically struggled to speak them.

For Rabbi Hirsch, this tension is what made Moshe Rabbeinu the ultimate prophet. He had the ideological engine, the unwavering commitment to justice, kindness, and truth. And his lack of the outward trappings of a leader demonstrates that only Divine intervention could have enabled his success. In this way, Moshe's humility made space for G-d. He straddled the line between embodying G-d's message, and revealing G-d's presence.

## Striving for Greatness

*Rabbi Yosef Goldin*

**I**n this week's parsha, as we are introduced to Moshe Rabbeinu as a child, we find that there is much to learn from- even what seem to be inconsequential details about his growing up.

After Moshe is retrieved from the Nile by Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, the Torah (2:7) tells us that Moshe's sister, Miriam, approaches Batya and offers to help her find an Israelite woman to nurse the baby. In giving context to this seemingly random offer, Rashi quotes the Gemara Sotah 12b that explains that after finding Moshe in the Nile, Batya took him to numerous Egyptian women to feed, and Moshe refused to eat from them. Miriam therefore offers to take him to one of the Israelite women, ultimately allowing him to be fed and nourished by his

own mother, Yocheved, during his early years. The Gemara then explains that the reason Moshe refused to eat from the Egyptian women is because of who Moshe was destined to become- that the mouth that is destined to speak with shechina could not nurse from a non-Jewish woman, and thereby receive the impurity that she consumed. Such a mouth could only nurse from a Jewish woman, who kept herself to a higher standard.

In his commentary on the Torah Emes L'yaakov, Rav Yaacov Kamenetzky points out that we learn a practical halacha from this Gemara- the Rama in Yoreh Deah 81:7 paskens that a Jewish baby should not nurse from a non-Jewish woman whenever there is an option to nurse from a Jewish woman. The Gr" a there quotes some who suggest



that the source for this halacha is the story of Moshe Rabbeinu. However, asks Reb Yaacov, how could the story of Moshe Rabbeinu be the source for this halacha? After all, as the Gemara explains so beautifully, the specific reason why Moshe was not allowed to nurse from a non-Jewish woman was because he was someone who literally spoke to G-d, because of his greatness- how can we infer from him to apply the same halacha to all other Jewish babies?

Reb Yaacov answers beautifully that we learn from here an important lesson in chinuch- that we have to believe that each of our children has the ability to achieve greatness. From the moment that they are infants, and throughout their lives, we must view our children as if they have the potential to reach the highest levels of spirituality and kedusha, perhaps even close to the level of Moshe Rabbeinu- and therefore treat them accordingly. We must realize that we will never know the tremendous heights that they may achieve.

I believe this message is one that is extremely relevant and poignant for us as parents. We must believe- and instill within our children- a sense of the endless potential of what they can achieve in life. Our children, each in their own way, have the ability to attain greatness- and it is our responsibility to inculcate that sense of tremendous opportunity within each of them as they grow up.

[new addition: I recently listened to a panel discussion on parenting with Charlie Harary, and he was asked to

reflect upon his experience in the business world, and what lessons from successful companies could be helpful in the world of parenting as well. He explained beautifully that one major factor that defines successful companies is their strive for greatness- they are always looking to become better, to do things better, to become great. They don't get disappointed/upset by any failure or bumps in the

road, they simply pick themselves up and continue working towards greatness. Sometimes we have kids, especially teens, that get bogged down by their failures or mistakes, and they pretty much give up on who they are or can become because of it. We need to instill within them the idea of *שבע יפול צדיק וקם* - and that you can always get back up, and continue striving for greatness.]

Of course, we must be extremely careful that this striving for greatness does not lead to undue stress or pressure. We also need to make sure that our children grow up with a healthy sense of humility, and understand their place within the greater Jewish community, and world in general.

However, the message we learn from baby Moshe is that already from a young age we must to instill within our children, and within ourselves, a sense of their tremendous potential, and a passion for them to realize that potential. It is imperative that our children grow up with a deep understanding of the greatness that lies within them, and thereby the greatness that they can bring to the world.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom!

## The Book of Redemption and Creation

*Rabbi Jeffrey Saks*

Two giants of biblical interpretation, Ramban and Netziv, appear to have more that sets them apart than unites their biographies. One was a 13th-century Sephardic Rishon, the other a late 19th-century Litvish Rosh Yeshiva. Yet, while the eras and milieu in which they composed their biblical commentaries seem worlds apart, there are numerous common concerns which make for fascinating points of intersection. Neither was hesitant to point out the human failings of the Avot and other biblical heroes, yet still find a way to venerate their virtues without tearing them down to size. Most of all, they shared a certain literary sensitivity in their interpretation of Humash, and both authored thematic introductions to each of the Five Books.

In their respective introductions to Exodus, they are motivated by a desire to put their finger on the book's central theme, and to understand how it connects back to Genesis. While a common question launches their examinations, it leads them to different, yet complimentary, conclusions.

Ramban observes the rabbinic nickname of the Torah's first book – Sefer Yetzira, the Book of Creation, which not only tells the tale of creation of heaven and earth, but of God's faithful nation, through Abraham and his descendants, who create a template for the future Jewish people. Exodus unpacks those ma'asim of the Avot as the simanim for the later generations. In that regard the entire second book can be titled Geula, the Book of Redemption,

even though the slaves are freed from Egyptian bondage already in chapter 15 (of 40 chapters in the book). Only once the Israelites have regained the lofty status of their forefathers, in intimate communion with God around Sinai and the Mishkan, have they been fully redeemed. It is this thematic thread that properly titles the whole work as the Book of Redemption – if redemption is properly understood as the physical rescue yoked to the spiritual revival of the children of Abraham.

Netziv, alternatively, points to an enigmatic comment (Sota 36b and Behag), which assigns titles to each of the five books, creative and descriptive names for the other four, while Exodus is dubbed merely “Book II,” as if to say it’s a “mere” sequel to Genesis. Netziv suggests that,

in fact, Genesis and Exodus really should be viewed as one book, unified by a common theme. Together they recount the tale of creation – from the calling into being of all matter, humanity, the Avot, their descendants’ exile in and redemption from Egypt, leading to the ultimately arrival at the purpose of that creation of heaven and earth: A “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” receiving the commandments and putting divine worship into practice in the Mishkan, erected only at the end of Exodus. In this regard, Netziv shows that together the Bible’s first two books form one unit: the creation of the physical universe, and the apex of that creation in the actualizing of its spiritual potential, through the Jewish people.

## The Circumcision of Eliezer: A Message for Busy Parents

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

In this week’s parasha, parashat Shemot, Moses emerges as the leader of Israel and begins the sacred mission of taking the people of Israel out of slavery from Egypt.

G-d has appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-4:17), and, despite his reluctance, Moses assumes the mantle of leadership for this great and historic task. Moses requests permission from his father-in-law, Jethro, to leave Midian and return to Egypt. With the staff of G-d in hand, Moses begins the journey back to the land of Pharaoh, together with his wife and his sons.

On the way back to Egypt, Moses and his family spend the night at an inn. Suddenly, Moses’ life is threatened, Exodus 4:24: וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ הַשָּׁם, וַיִּבְקֶשׂ הָמַיְתוֹ, *And G-d encountered him and sought to kill him.* Tzipporah, Moses’ wife, immediately takes a flintstone and cuts off the foreskin of her son, touches it to his feet, and proclaims: (Exodus 4:25) כִּי חָתָן דְּמַיִם אֶתָּה לִי, “*You are a bridegroom for bloodshed.*” Scripture then informs us that Moses is released, and once again Tzipporah says, (Exodus 4:26) חָתָן דְּמַיִם, לְמוֹלַת, “*a bridegroom’s bloodshed because of circumcision.*”

This strange, indeed mysterious, interlude is tackled by many biblical commentators who offer a host of explanations in their attempts to clarify the strange goings-on here.

Careful readers must have certainly spotted an obvious textual issue. Scripture says in Exodus 4:20 that Moses took his wife and his “sons” and mounted them on the

donkey for the trip back to Egypt. How could that be? We know of only one son, Gershon, who, in Exodus 2:22, was reported to have been born. Who is this second son? We learn later in Exodus 18:4, that there is a second son, Eliezer, but his birth is never reported in the text. Perhaps Moses received his “marching orders” from the “Chief,” and had to leave so quickly that there just was no time to report that Eliezer was born. It may sound cute, but something like that did probably happen—as Moses was about to leave Midian with his family, a child was born.

Now please recall, the mitzvah of “Brit Milah,” circumcision, had been given to Abraham as recorded in Genesis 17. Circumcision had already been practiced by Abraham’s descendants for several generations. So, it is quite clear that Moses was obligated to perform this mitzvah on his newborn son.

Rashi cites a Talmudic Midrash, recorded in Nedarim 31b and 32a, that maintains that an angel sought to kill Moses because he failed to circumcise his son, Eliezer. Rabbi Josef says, “G-d forbid, it wasn’t that Moses was negligent, but rather, that he had to decide, ‘Shall I circumcise my son now and subject the infant to danger by beginning our journey to Egypt? I could tarry three days in Midian for the child to recover, but, after all, G-d commanded me to go to Egypt?’” Instead, Moses begins the journey without performing the ritual, hoping to find an appropriate time to circumcise the child. Moses, says Rashi, was held culpable, because when he finally

arrived at the inn, instead of performing the circumcision immediately, he busied himself with making arrangements for his own lodging.

Perhaps, the issue was something more than just Moses' indecision regarding exposing the child to danger. Perhaps, Moses felt that he had been commanded by G-d to go to Egypt to save millions of Jewish lives—which takes precedence over the personal mitzvah to circumcise his child. “Shall I tarry in Midian, or on the road,” thought Moses, “to circumcise the child, while millions of Jewish lives are at stake?”

Although Moses was a reluctant leader, once he accepted the role of leader, he did so with consummate devotion. Based on his compelling logic, Moses decides not to tarry, and postpones the circumcision. G-d, or the angel of G-d, finds his decision inappropriate and seeks to kill Moses. Were it not for Tziporah, Moses would have died. In effect, G-d informs Moses, that while you may be the leader of all of Israel, you may not neglect your own family. “I,” says G-d, “will assume responsibility for the child's health and well being. You, Moses, must circumcise the child, and then, and only then, may you continue on your mission.”

This profound message applies to all parents, leaders and successful business people who seem to have time for everybody, but their own closest relatives.

Moses almost dies. Tziporah saves him at the last moment. Has Moses learned his lesson? Not at least according to the commentators in parashat Ba'ha'a'lot'cha, Numbers 12, where a similar issue arises.

Miriam speaks against Moses. Her complaint is that Moses has neglected his family, has left his wife, because he was overly preoccupied with tending to the flock of the Al-mighty—the People of Israel. And while G-d punishes Miriam for questioning Moses' devotion to G-d and the Jewish people, Rabbinic tradition sees it otherwise. From the biblical texts, it seems that Moses has a much stronger relationship with Aaron's four sons than with his own children. In fact, except for recording their births and genealogies, Gershom and Eliezar are never really spoken about in the Bible. Beyond that, our rabbis point to a passage in Judges 18:30, asserting that Yehonatan, Moses' own grandson, became the minister of an idolatrous cult that the tribe of Dan established in the North.

All this brings to mind the insightful quip cited by Dennis Prager: “No man has ever said on his dying bed,

‘Oh, why didn't I spend more time in the office?’”

There is much we can learn from the actions of Moses, our Master, about rebalancing our priorities in life to make certain that we dedicate sufficient quality and quantity time to the needs of our own families.