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Some First Impressions of a Visit In Israel

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered January 16, 1971)

Some three months ago, when I left for Israel, I told my congregation that I was doing so with mixed feelings: I was sorry to leave them, but expectantly anticipating my visit in the Holy Land. Now that I have returned, I do so once again with mixed feelings, but in the opposite direction.

We were sorry to leave Israel, for it is beautiful beyond words. The report that we bring back to our congregation is identical with that brought by Joshua and Caleb to their "congregation of the Children of Israel," when they said: "The land, which we passed through to spy it out (or, better, la-tur should be translated 'to tour it'), it is an exceedingly good land" (Nu. 14:7). We fell in love with the land, both with its avir and its avira, with its air and its atmosphere, its meteorological climate and its social and spiritual milieu. So reluctant were we to leave, that many members of the Lamm family – indeed, all of them – wept as they left Jerusalem. And yet we are happy to be back in the bosom of our family, with our friends and beloved congregation, reunited with the faces we know and enjoy and are so comfortable with.

However, in one significant way my negative feelings are far more pronounced now. For I am profoundly and immeasurably saddened that my return has been marred by the cruel suddenness of the death of two trusted associates and exceedingly dear friends. Without them, The Jewish Center will never quite be the same again. All during this week I felt that their presence permeated every part of this building. Their presence is here, but they are not; and all of us are the poorer for it. All of us, therefore, shall have to rededicate ourselves to The Jewish Center and to the cause which it serves, and thereby perpetuate the memory of these noble souls.

The impressions with which I return are too many to

be conveyed in one talk. Besides, not enough time has elapsed for me to gain a sufficient perspective to organize them coherently. No doubt, they will be reflected from this pulpit in the weeks and months to come, please God.

Today I would like to touch on a number of preliminary points that impress an American visitor. I say "visitor," not "tourist." For there is a vast difference between viewing Israel as a resident and viewing it as a tourist between the vantage point of a home, and that of the lobby of the King David Hotel; between seeing the sights and living the life of Israel.

One final word of introduction: there are negative features too to the reality called Israel. Unless one is aware of them and understands them and attempts to help overcome them, he performs no service for Israel. Overidealization and overromanticization of Israel can be dangerous as it is unfair to the Jewish state, its government and society, and people. Nonsense, even well intentioned nonsense, serves no cause well.

The first major impression I bring with me concerns differences in psychology between Israeli and American Jews. I learned that there really is such a thing as a galut-psychology.

An Israeli friend has pointed out to me that this difference in psychology is reflected in the change from last week's portion, Vayehi, to this week's portion, Shemos. The hero of last week's reading was Joseph, that of this week's reading is Moses. Joseph was the galut-Jew par excellence. He was Yosef Ha-tzaddik, a pious and observant Jew. He sought at all times to protect Jewish interests, and provided for his brethren the land of Goshen. But his main interest and the major service of his life he gave – to Egypt. In the end, his entire fortune, both materially and intellectually, was left to Egypt; all that Israel got were the atzmot Yosef, his remains, his bones.

Moses, although he was born in the palace of Pharaoh and not in the Land of Israel as was Joseph, was just the reverse: he was a Jewish leader who gave all his fabulous potentialities and capacities to Jewry, to the Promised Land; all that remained for the Diaspora was – his remains, interred beyond the River Jordan. Moses began his career of Jewish leadership when he was outraged by the patent injustice perpetrated against his own people: “And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown up, that he went out unto his brethren, and looked on their suffering; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brethren” (Exodus 2:11). He identified with his brethren, and accepted their interest as primary. He was not a galut-Jew, though he lived in the golah. He was not impressed with mah yomru ha-goyim, with what the non-Jews will say – as was Joseph, who went to great pains to dress his aged father properly and to teach him how to speak in order that he should not be embarrassed when the old man appears before Pharaoh and the royal court. Moses was not afraid of a Security Council, nor, I believe, would Moses have panicked had he been scolded by the imperious editorial writers of the equivalent of the New York Times.

Israeli Jews are similarly unafraid. I do not mean that they perform heroics, and that they thumb their noses at the entire world. They are practitioners of realpolitik and understand the principles of power and appreciate the necessity for alliances. Israeli Jews, unencumbered by a galut-psychology, accept it as quite natural and normal for a people, like individuals, to put its own interests first. That is why, although they were angry at the way France ruptured its relationships with Israel, they were not quite as emotional as American Jews when France betrayed Israel for the Arab cause. They felt that it is only right for France to tend to its own interests first. And that too is why they fault American Jews for excessive liberalism on the Vietnam question. They feel that we American Jews have not only identified ourselves generally with the anti-Vietnam stance, but that we have given the impression abroad that fighting against involvement in the Vietnam war is part of the function of being American Jew, that being anti-Vietnam is an expression of Judaism. We have created the impression that we are against any American effort to fight off Russian or Communist incursions any place in the world. We have signaled to the American government that it is the Jewish stand that America refrain from confronting Soviet imperialism wherever it

may arise. Therefore, American Jews have sacrificed their own interests on the altar of a moralizing liberalism – by compromising Israel’s opportunities to get America to provide the deterrent against any possible massive Russian intervention in the Middle East. I am not commenting on the politics or morality of this criticism; but it is something I have heard from many, many important Israelis in all sectors of government and society, and it is important for us to think upon it carefully.

The self-confidence of the Israelis is amazing and reassuring. Here they are, three million Israeli citizens surrounded by a sea of millions upon millions of Arabs. And yet, when they bade farewell to the Lamm family returning to the United States, whether at the special farewell events or over the telephone or meeting neighbors in the streets, almost all of them to a man expressed pity and compassion for us because we were leaving the serenity, the security, and the safety of Israel for the uncharted jungles of the streets of New York!

The feeling of confidence, after a while, becomes infectious. When, in the first week of our stay in Israel, in Netanyah, an automobile was mined some five blocks away, we felt apprehensive. But, when two weeks ago at the end of our stay, a Katyusha rocket exploded one and a half blocks from our home in Jerusalem, we read about it the next day in the newspapers, shrugged, and went on to other things. The equanimity is contagious.

The same non-galut psychology results in a kind of generosity of spirit. Imagine if some important Anglo-Jewish newspaper were to publish a special supplement for Christmas. We should be angry, outraged, and our indignation would be thoroughly justified. Yet when the Jerusalem Post published a Christmas edition for tourists and Christian citizens, I took the exact opposite point of view after my first impulse of annoyance: here we are in the majority, we need feel no embarrassment or humiliation in making a magnanimous gesture to the visitors and to the minority groups. And what a good feeling that is! When one is at home, he can afford to be more generous than when he is in someone else’s home.

Related to this is a second point, that of identity.

Here in the United States, Jewish identity is problematical; in Israel it is taken for granted by an overwhelming majority of the people, with the possible exception of a small group of individuals who call themselves Kenaanim. There, Jewishness is a fact, not an

idea; a reality, not a desideratum. Here, there is hardly a parent who someplace in the back of his mind or the bottom of his heart has not begun to worry about whether his children and grandchildren will marry within the fold and remain Jewish; there, such problems rarely occur. Jewish identity is natural and visible -- let alone in Meah Shearim (and Meah Shearim is not all Neturei Kartal!) on Saturday night, when walking or even driving through the streets one sees the Hasidim, still clad in their Sabbath best of shtreimlech and bekishes, whether on the old patriarchs or on the little boys running along, as if they still bear with them the glory, the beauty, the very delicious odors of the Sabbath that had just departed; let alone the Kotel, no longer the Wailing Wall, on Friday night — that Kotel which, despite all the cynicism which you bring towards the hypersentimentality associated with it, works its glorious magic on all those willing to listen to it -- where one prays, whether with Sephardim or Ashkenazim, whether with the Vishnitzer Hasidim on the left or the Boyaner Hasidim on the right, or with the more modern Israeli Yeshivat HaKotel in the center; but even on the decidedly unspiritual campuses of the Universities, even in Leftist kibbutzim — and the kibbutzim, whether of left or right, seem to be the last strongholds of sensible and mature ideology left in the world today; in the very streets of the cities, especially that incomparable city of Jerusalem, where the very stones are the color of kedushah! How right Bialik was when he said that in Eretz Israel even the goyim are Jewish!

And that is something we must learn to develop here. Identity as Jews will never be as unproblematical in the Diaspora as it is in Israel, but Israel can serve as an ideal and a model for Jewish communities elsewhere.

This idea concerning Jewish identity has been expressed, obliquely but beautifully, in a comment by the great Hasidic sage, the author of *Benei Yisaskhor*. We read this morning of the directions given by Pharaoh to the Hebrew midwives, who play such a crucial role in the entire Exodus story:

ויאמר מלך מצרים למילדות העבריות אשר שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה.

“And the King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of one was Shifrah and the name of the other Puah” (Exodus 1:15). Now, that is a patently incomplete sentence; any teacher of composition would mark it wrong were it handed in by a modern student. Furthermore, the next sentence begins with the word *Vayomer*, “And

he said.” Clearly, what the King of Egypt said in the first sentence has been omitted. What does the verse mean? Our Hasidic sage offers an answer based upon the Jewish tradition that Shifrah and Puah were really Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moses. Now, “Shifrah” and “Puah” are not Hebrew but Egyptian names. Hence, what the Biblical verse means is this: And the King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, that the name of one shall be Shifrah and the name of the second shall be Puah. Pharaoh wanted them to change their names, their clothing, their language, their culture -- he wanted them to transform their very self-definitions from a Jewish to an Egyptian identity! Pharaoh wanted to wear down their Jewishness by changing their names as a beginning. It is to their everlasting credit and tribute that they resisted this assault upon their Jewish identity. And that is precisely what we are called upon to do today: to learn from the Israelis to take our Jewish identity as natural, and not to apologize for it.

The third point is one which I was aware of before, but which was vigorously reinforced on my recent visit. That is, that there must be an ongoing and more intensive relationship and dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora. On this depends the very future of the Jewish people.

A week or two ago, Menahem Begin told me that to his mind there are three centers of world Jewry today: American Jewry is the financial heart, Israel is the spiritual center, and Russian Jewry is the moral focus of the world Jewish community. Now, that is not altogether correct. Thus, American Jewry has some significant spiritual and moral treasures. But there is a large element of truth in this general formulation.

Unquestionably, American Jewry must continue to underwrite in even greater measure than heretofore the defense and development and education of Israel. And we must do so without complaining, for the Israeli citizen pays much more than we do. His enormous taxes -- the highest in the world -- are his own participation in the defense and development of the country, its education, and the ingathering of refugees and immigrants.

But it is not a one-way street. Next week, please God, we shall discuss in greater detail some aspects of the religious situation of Israel, and the specific contributions that American Jewry can make other than simply signing checks, although that is included. One of those contributions, both to Israel and the bonds that tie Jews

throughout the world together, are the great religious and educational institutions that we have built in this country.

You have no idea how attractive Yeshiva University is to Israelis of all sectors, how they would welcome it, how deep its influence already is upon Israel as an idea and a model and symbol even without being there physically.

You have no idea how synagogues like The Jewish Center would be welcome in Israel, how they are not a purely local phenomenon in America, how the idea of what we represent -- the confluence of cultures, the form of service we strive for -- how all this makes an impression on Israelis and is carried to them by visitors that come back and forth.

Hence, the upbuilding -- financial, educational, moral -- of such institutions is a major contribution not only to American Jewry, but to world Jewry and to Israel as well.

Most Israelis I have met, though they clamour for an American aliyah, and challenge every visitor with the question, "When are you coming?" have outgrown the simplistic notion that we shall all come overnight, or the Ben-Gurion-expectation that we will all come if we are sufficiently scolded. Israelis are now even mature enough not to consider that American Jews who invest in their communal institutions are betraying Israel by making the golah too permanent. Indeed, what Israel needs now is both our direct help and our indirect help -- by remaining proud, intelligent, committed Jews. They are deeply concerned by the fallout of our younger generation, its assimilation, its leftist politics, its hippiedom. If we shall thrive as a committed, knowledgeable, Israel-conscious Jewish community, it will be good for Israel; otherwise it will not. Perhaps we ought to paraphrase what an ex-Secretary of Defense of this country once said: What is good for them, is good for us; and what is good for us, is good for them.

So let us continue to develop this interrelationship. Let us have access to each other, support each other, reinforce each other. And this is especially true of leadership. I have

Making It Good

Dr. Erica Brown

As we open up the book of Exodus, we find ourselves in a time of transition. Joseph's death is recorded at the end of Genesis. A new Pharaoh is put in power. Leadership transitions are always concerning. Joseph's meteoric success and contributions are suddenly

told to young leaders in Israel, and it is at least equally true of those who aspire to leadership in this country: It is a practical urgency and a moral prerequisite for leaders in each of these two communities to have a deep experience of the other. Israelis must know American Jewry well before they become Israeli leaders; and Jewish religious and communal leaders must have profound experience of Israel before they are entrusted with leadership in American Jewry.

These, then, are some of my first impressions: the psychology of confidence, the identity as Jews, the interrelationship of both communities.

But above all, with all my desire to see the building up of American Jewry, and with all the quantitative superiority of American Jewry over Israel, I am convinced beyond a question of doubt: there, there is the center of a stage on which the drama of Jewish history is being played out in modern times and will continue to be played out until the end of time. That, to use the modern colloquialism, is "where the action is."

"It is a land which the Lord thy God cares for; the eyes of the Lord thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year" (Deut. 11:12).

Without being too anthropomorphic, may I say that God hears about us here; His ears are open. But He looks at Israel, His eyes are directed there.

He is concerned about us — but He is interested in and delights in them.

And even as His eyes are turned to Eretz Israel, so may our eyes behold the Land close up: to live there, if possible; to stay there for a long while if not. But if only for short trips -- go, go, go.

But go not merely as a tourist; rather go as a pilgrim, an *oleh regel*.

For a tourist is one who goes to see the sights. Whereas a pilgrim goes — in search of a vision.

Read more at www.yu.edu/about/lamm-heritage.

eclipsed by fear that the Israelites will become a fifth column. The new Pharaoh took desperate and despotic measures to reduce, quite literally, what he saw as a security threat: "Then Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, 'Every boy that is born you shall throw into the Nile, but let

every girl live” (Ex. 1:22). Forced labor was not enough. Murder was the next step in eradicating our people.

Into this oppressive climate, we are introduced to two unnamed individuals as chapter two opens: “A certain member of the house of Levi went and took a woman of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw how beautiful he was, she hid him for three months” (Ex. 2:1-2). The child is also not given a name. All we know is that the couple each have a noble tribal affiliation that will make an imprint on their baby. The Levites will soon emerge as spiritual leaders of their people.

When this Jewish mother sees her Jewish son right after Pharaoh promulgated his decree, her first two words should have been *oy vey*. Instead they are “*ki tov*” – translated here in the English as “she saw how beautiful he was.” Literally, the expression means he is good, or it is good. Nothing could have been further from the truth. Having a male child was a death sentence.

Rashi’s grandson, the Rashbam (R. Samuel ben Meir), simply directs readers, without any explanation, to the first chapter of Genesis, where the expression “*ki tov*,” it is good, appears multiple times. The first was when God created light from darkness: “God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness” (Gen. 1:4). Creating light from darkness is good. *Ki tov* is used another 5 times in this chapter, culminating in a superlative state of goodness “*tov me’od*,” it was very good: “And God saw all that had been made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day” (Gen.1:31). Although not everything God creates is labeled good, altogether “*tov*” appears 7 times in the chapter, paralleling the days of creation and the idea of seven throughout the Bible as a state or cycle of completion.

It’s easy to say that if God creates the result is good, until we arrive at chapter two when God is not satisfied with divine creation: “God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make a fitting counterpart for him’” (Gen. 2:18). *The New York Times* critic, A. O. Scott, in his book *Better Living through Criticism* claims that God’s assessment here makes God the first critic! Scott cites the biologist E. O. Wilson, who contends that, “the creative arts became possible as an evolutionary advance when humans developed the capacity for abstract thought.” Scott then compares the work of critics today to the “original critic” of Genesis, “who cast his eyes over what he had made and decided it was good.”

Rashbam, in simply directing us from the beginning chapters of Exodus back to the beginning of Genesis, may be asking the reader to make comparisons between the world God created out of chaos and the nation that the Israelites had to build out of chaos. The ability to look at a situation that on the surface looks terrible and be able, despite the anguish, to recast it as something with the potential for goodness is a hallmark of leadership.

The recognition of goodness and the ability to label it as such is one of the key ways that we act in imitation of God. “To see that someone is good and to say so is a creative act,” writes Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in “The Three Stages of Creation,” *Covenant & Conversation*, “one of the great creative acts ... Within almost all of us is something positive and unique, but which is all too easily injured, and which only grows when exposed to the sunlight of someone else’s recognition and praise. To see the good in others and let them see themselves in the mirror of our regard is to help someone grow to become the best they can be.”

In leadership, recognizing and naming the good is essential for hiring talent, keeping talent, and sustaining reliable growth. In *Forbes*, Joyce E. A. Russell concludes, “... Positive leadership has been shown to be related to better organizational outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction job performance, going above and beyond at work, psychological well-being, organizational commitment, creativity) than negative leadership styles (which have been shown to be related to turnover intentions, stress, anxiety, absenteeism, job burnout, retaliatory behaviors). In short, leaders set the tone for their team and/or organization” (“Positive Leadership: It Makes a Difference”).

Emma Seppälä and Kim Cameron, in their *HBR* article “The Best Leaders Have a Contagious Positive Energy” (April 18, 2022) calls such leaders “positive energizers” and identify qualities associated with positive energizers: “Energizers’ greatest secret is that, by uplifting others through authentic, values-based leadership, they end up lifting up both themselves and their organizations. Positive energizers demonstrate and cultivate virtuous actions, including forgiveness, compassion, humility, kindness, trust, integrity, honesty, generosity, gratitude, and recognition in the organization. As a result, everyone flourishes.”

In Jewish law, we bless on the bad as we bless on the good. This is how we demonstrate acceptance of that which is beyond our control. It is also a way we imitate God. That

which is good can become bad in our eyes, and that which is bad can become good. If our subjective analysis can go in either direction, we have a choice: will we be able to see the good in what is bad and make it so or will we see the bad in what is good?

This is a divine task of immense proportions and the challenge of living in a broken world. God models it and invites us to do the same. Moses' mother models it and invites us to do the same. She was able to see beyond

I Feel Your Pain

Rabbi Joshua (The Hoffer) Hoffman z"l

Moshe, upon learning that Pharaoh is after him because he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who was attacking a Jew, flees to the wilderness and saves Yisro's daughters from a group of shepherds who had been attacking them. He then meets Yisro, marries his daughter Tziporah, and becomes a shepherd himself, tending the flocks of his father-in-law. Decades later, when Moshe is already eighty years old, he has his first prophetic vision. An angel of God appears to him from within a burning thorn bush, which, although aflame, is not consumed. When God sees that Moshe turned aside to look closer at this vision, he tells him not to proceed, but, first, to take off his shoes, because he is treading on holy ground. What was the purpose of removing his shoes in a holy place? Many explanations have been given, as we shall see, but I would first like to mention a seemingly very strange one, given by Rabbi Ya'akov Moshe Helin, a 17th century rabbinic scholar, in his commentary on the Midrash Rabbah, Yedei Moshe.

When God first speaks to Moshe, He says, "I am the God of your father the God of Avrohom, the God of Yitzchok, and the God of Ya'akov" (Shemos 16:6). The Midrash Rabbah (Shemos 3:1) says that when God told Moshe that he was the God of his father, he was referring to Moshe's father, Amram. Since Moshe was a novice to prophecy, God did not want to frighten him, and so He spoke to Moshe in the voice of his father. Moshe at first thought that his father was speaking to him, but God explained that He was communicating with him using his voice, and that when He referred to himself as 'the God of your father, he meant 'the God of Amram.' Rabbi Helin writes that since there is a principle that God does not mention His name in connection with a tzaddik who

Pharaoh's awful decree by looking at the exquisite innocence of her son and naming the unvarnished beauty and goodness she saw in front of her. Her optimism and fierce commitment at this difficult time had a prophetic impact on the Jewish future. She gave birth to Judaism's greatest hero: "Never again did there arise in Israel a prophet like Moses..." (Deut. 34:10).

What goodness is in front of you right now that you need to see and name?

is still alive, Moshe understood that his father had died, and that is why he took his shoes off! When I first saw this comment many years ago, I felt that it could scarcely be taken seriously. Even if we assume that Moshe kept all of the laws of the Torah before they were given, including the rabbinic laws, as the midrash tells us regarding our forefather Avrohom, it seems difficult to explain that God told him to take his shoes off because his father had died. After all, God Himself told Moshe to take his shoes off because he was on holy ground! However, I believe that there is a way of understanding this explanation in a plausible manner, within the context of Moshe's development as the man who would lead his people out of slavery and into redemption.

When God asked Moshe to lead the people out of Egypt, Moshe declined, and presented repeated arguments for not being the person to go on this mission. God answered all of his arguments, until, finally, Moshe said, "send by the hand of whomever you will send" (Shemos 4:13). Rabbi Avraham, son of the Rambam, points out that Moshe, here, does not present any reason for his reluctance to go. Rabbi Avraham suggests, based on a later incident in Moshe's life, that Moshe preferred staying in the wilderness and perfecting himself, enjoying his closeness to God. Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein, in his book *Tzir Vetzohn*, writes, in a more expanded way, that although Moshe, earlier in life, had taken an active interest in the well-being of his fellow Israelites, and placed himself into mortal danger by saving one of them from an Egyptian tormenter, he had now been staying with Yisro for many years, working as a shepherd and developing his spirituality and connection with God, just as Yisro had been doing after renouncing his idolatrous beliefs and moving to the

wilderness. Seen in this context, we can now examine some of the other explanations given for the need for removing one's shoes while standing on holy ground, and, specifically, why God told Moshe to do so at that time.

Ralbag explains that the reason that God told Moshe to remove his shoes was simply to show reverence to a holy place, and not treat it in the same manner as one treats an ordinary place. Thus, the Talmud, in Berachos (54a), tells us that one should not enter the Temple Mount while wearing shoes. Chizkuni, similarly, says that in the course of walking, a person may step on some filthy object, and it is not fitting to be in a holy place while having such substances attached to his shoes. On a more essential level, my teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, explained that shoes represent adaptability. By wearing shoes, one is able to protect himself from any harmful substances that he may step on, and thus walk securely on any terrain. On a wider level, then, shoes represent man's ability to adapt to any circumstances that may confront him, protecting himself from any situations that he may find uncomfortable. When one is standing on holy ground, or, on a wider level, when he is dealing with matters of holiness, he dare not adapt himself to circumstances and, out of convenience, protect himself from performing his duties.

Rabbi Levi Meier, in his book, *Moses: The Prince, the Prophet*, writes, gives a somewhat different perspective to the need for Moshe to remove his shoes. He writes, "Shoes protect us from the harshness of the ground, and Moshe was being told to divest himself of anything that might be a barrier between him and the ground upon which he walks. He was to feel the earth beneath him, the pebbles and grains of sand under his feet. This sensitivity would be necessary for him to lead. Since a leader's sensitivity must be fine-tuned to the feelings of the people." With the comments of Rabbi Avraham and Rabbi Lichtenstein in mind, perhaps we can add that Moshe simply needed to feel the pain of his people. The rabbis tell us that the message of the burning bush was that God, represented by

the flame, is with His people in their pain. By telling Moshe to remove his shoes, he was telling him, that, he, too, must feel that pain. The cryptic reference to his father's death was a way of moving him to feel a sense of personal loss, and through it, transfer the resultant feeling of pain onto the wider plane of the suffering of his nation. Thus, Moshe's feelings of grief for his father were to serve as a catalyst for him to feel the suffering of his people, and accept the task of leading them out of slavery.

We still need to understand, however, what Moshe's removal of his shoes had to do with the fact that he was stepping on holy ground. Following, again, Rabbi Avraham's explanation of Moshe's reluctance to accept his mission, perhaps we can say that God was telling Moshe not to think that holiness comes through withdrawing into oneself and meditating. Holiness, rather, comes through being involved with the problems of others, and bringing God's presence into their lives. Rabbi Menachem Kasher, in his *Torah Shleimah*, cites midrashim that point out the connection between the word for bush - 'sneh' - and the word Sinai. Moshe's prophetic vision, they say, took place on Mt. Choreiv, another name for Mt. Sinai, where the Torah would be given to the nation, and where they would be charged to be a 'kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' Rav Kook wrote that the point of forming a holy nation was to demonstrate that a life of holiness is not restricted to people living alone on a mountain, but is something that has relevance to a nation involved in all the various aspects of life. The kohanim in the Temple blessed the people each day with love, following the lead of Aharon, the first high priest, who demonstrated his love for all Jews by acting as the peace maker whenever a dispute would arise. By telling Moshe to remove his shoes in order to feel the nation's pain and thereby be activated to lead them out of Egypt and toward Mt. Sinai, God was offering him a path to holiness more effective than the path of secluded meditation that he wished to continue on.

Three Signs of Moshe Rabbeinu

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

Towards the beginning of the parsha, Moshe Rabbeinu and Hashem have a conversation that is difficult to understand. When Moshe met Hashem at Har Sinai, Hashem told him to take the Jews out of

Mitzrayim. In the course of a long dialogue—Rashi says that it lasted a whole week—Moshe resisted accepting this mission. Why didn't Moshe want to accept the mission?

The Shem Mishmuel focuses on a part of that dialogue

in order to explain some deep Chassidic teachings which can answer our question. We now paraphrase the dialogue as follows:

Hashem told Moshe to take the Jewish People out of Egypt. "I will be with you," He assured Moshe. "You will bring them to Har Sinai and receive the Torah."

Moshe asked, "When I come to the Jewish People and I tell them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' they will ask me, 'What is His name?' What should I tell them?"

God told Moshe, "I will be what I will be. Go tell the Jewish People, 'Ehkeh has sent me to you.'"

God said more to Moshe: Tell the people that Hashem, the God of your fathers Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is My name for all generations. Go gather the leaders of Israel and tell them, "Hashem, the God of your fathers, has sent me. I have brought your situation to My mind. I know what has happened to you in Egypt. I will bring you to the land that flows with milk and honey." Then they will listen to you. Then go with the elders to Pharaoh and say, "Let us go bring sacrifices to our God in Egypt." He will not listen to you. I will then perform miracles there and he will release you. I will have the Egyptians lend you clothing and all sorts of things.

Moshe objected that the Jews would still not listen to him. They would protest that God had not appeared to him. Hashem asked Moshe, "What is in your hand?"

"A stick," Moshe replied.

"Throw it down," Hashem responded. It turned into a snake. "Pick it up," Hashem said. It became a stick again. "Do this sign and they will believe that God has appeared to you," He concluded.

Hashem then gave Moshe another sign. "Put your hand into your chest, then take it out," and it was white with leprosy. "Put your hand back," and it returned to its normal color. "If they don't listen to the first sign, they will listen to the second. And if they don't listen to the second sign, then here is one more. Take water from the river and pour it onto the ground, whereupon it will turn into blood."

God's Names

There are many difficulties with this part of the dialogue.

What was the issue of God's name? Furthermore, why did Hashem give Moshe three signs? Additionally, this whole discussion seems to be backwards. If Moshe thought that the Jewish People wouldn't believe, it would make sense for Hashem to give the signs. When Moshe would

first give them the message, either they would believe or they wouldn't believe. If they wouldn't believe, then he would show them the signs. Once they would believe based on the signs, then they could discuss God's name. But the discussion of God's name appears first. This seems completely out of order!

Additionally, how is it possible that the elders of the Jewish People did not know who God was? They were Jews! They had a tradition that God would redeem them from the Egyptian exile. Yosef had told them so, as recorded in Parshas Vayechi. They certainly had a tradition about God himself. What is the meaning of the question about God's name?

Chazal say that Moshe was mistaken when he said that the people would not believe him. He spoke out of line; they would have believed even without the signs. But why did Moshe think otherwise?

There is still one more astounding question. Hashem told Moshe, "*V'sham'u l'kolecha*. They will listen to your voice." Then Moshe challenged Hashem, saying, "*V'heim lo ya'aminu li v'lo yishme'u b'koli*. They will not believe me or listen to me." How could Moshe brazenly contradict Hashem?! These are just some of the questions concerning this puzzling dialogue.

The Argument for Redemption

The Shem Mishmuel addresses these questions by explaining the themes of chesed and din. Hashem created the world using two pillars upon which the world stands: kindness and justice. God has mercy, kindness, and love for His creations. At the same time, He demands justice and is strict about adherence to the law. This is the dialectic between chesed and din, both in the way God created the world and in the way He runs it. Chesed and din are at the very root of creation. With this in mind, we will investigate the exodus and redemption of the Jewish People from Egypt. Was it a redemption based on chesed or on din? Was it God's mercy or God's justice at work when He redeemed His people?

The Midrash (Shir Hashirim Rabba 2:8) comments that when Moshe came to the Jewish People and told them that they would be redeemed, they responded that it cannot be. "We have a tradition that Hashem told Avraham at the bris bein habesarim that the Egyptians will subjugate the Jews for 400 years. We have been here for only 210 years. How can you claim that Hashem will take us out now?" Moshe responded, "Hashem wants to take you out and I am His

messenger. He will pay no attention to these calculations of yours.”

But still, Hashem did give a time frame of 400 years to Avraham. How could Moshe honestly say that if Hashem wants, He can take them out before 400 years have passed?

The Midrash continues that the Jews said, “What you are saying cannot be true, because we do not have maasim tovim. We are slaves busy with survival and don’t have time to do good deeds. We have bad deeds. Why would Hashem take us out?” Moshe responded, “Since Hashem wants to take you out, He will not pay attention to your evil deeds.”

Then the Midrash says the Jews challenged Moshe by asking, “How could we be redeemed? All of Egypt is full of our idols. Why would Hashem take us out now?” Moshe said, “Since Hashem wants to take you out, He will not pay attention to your idolatry.”

The Midrash thus presents three reasons why the Jewish People objected to the proposition that the time had come for their redemption:

1. It was before the time promised to Avraham.
2. The Jews had performed evil rather than good deeds.
3. The Jews were idol makers and worshipers.

Moshe’s answer in all three instances was that, nevertheless, God indeed wants to redeem you, and He will do so despite your objections. Thus, the Jews were saying, “We understand that Hashem wants to take us out based on justice, din, and you are his messenger. But according to the perspective of din, because of these three reasons, we do not deserve it. How can din say that God will take us out and make us His holy nation? This goes against the prediction to Avraham!”

Moshe answered, “If Hashem wills your redemption, He can and will redeem you. There is a Divine desire that goes beyond logic. It is an expression of goodness, kindness, and mercy. God wants to take you out as an act of chesed, divine mercy that goes beyond any rational justification. You really do not deserve this according to the rules of justice, but God loves you and will take you out anyway.

Unjust Kindness

What a lesson for us in our dealings with other people! If Hashem had dealt with the Jewish People only with din, they would not have left Egypt at all. According to Chassidus, they never would have left Egypt because they were already at the forty-ninth level of tuma. They would have become completely lost in Egypt had they stayed another 190 years. Yet Hashem did redeem His holy people

with Godly love and generosity.

The Exodus was an act beyond justice and logic. It was pure kindness, an undeserved gift due to Hashem’s intense love for the avos. This is why Hashem refers to Himself repeatedly in the conversation with Moshe as the God of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov. In our very birth as the Jewish People, Hashem made the act of kindness the very center and seed of our creation as a people.

This is how we must behave in our families and with our colleagues. We cannot be so demanding so as to always expect fairness. We have to do good even when there is injustice. We have to show mercy even when it is not deserved. This is fundamental to our creation as a holy people. The Torah repeatedly reminds us to be kind to all people, especially to the poor and disadvantaged. *Paso’ach tiftach*, give to the poor person, say Chazal, even 100 times. Even if he is exaggerating his demands for charity, you should respond.

So much of the Torah is chesed. For example, there is a mitzva in the Torah to give interest-free loans. The mitzva of shmitta cancels outstanding loans every seven years. Another requirement of the shmitta year is to allow anyone to come into our property and take from the produce of our crops, even from our own backyards.

These mitzvos are amazing acts of kindness. We don’t always live up to these standards now, instead using halachic loopholes to evade these laws. But we are not proud of this and hope to elevate ourselves to the point that we will be able to keep these mitzvos properly. This kindness has its root in the Exodus. Hashem took us out of Egypt with kindness that was far beyond what we deserved.

What’s in a Name?

With this background, we can understand why Moshe expected the Jewish People to ask about Hashem’s name, since Hashem interacts with the world using alternating modes. Sometimes, He utilizes the mode of din, while at other times, he uses the mode of chesed. The name that God is called at any particular time serves to indicate the mode that He is using. The Divine name describes how God behaves toward us. Understanding by which name Hashem should be referred to was therefore a key to appreciating the possibility of the Exodus.

The Gemara (Shevu’os 35a) teaches that there are seven primary names of God. Six of them represent different levels of judgment: *Adnus*, *Keil*, *Elokim*, *Tzvakot*, *Shakai*, and *Eloka*. Each one has a unique connotation. Each of

them represents some level of din. According to Chassidus, each name represents a level of tzimtzum, confinement of God's presence. The names give us a restricted point of view. The seventh four-letter name of Hashem, though, relates to the essence of Hashem. It represents His very existence, not just how He behaves. The existence of Hashem is limitless, and this is the Name of chesed.

Chesed does not have any rules that confine it. It is beyond recognition or definition. The closer we get to the essence of God, the more chesed we discover. This is a very important concept in Chassidus. At the essence of things, kindness is more strongly pronounced. The further from the essence, the more din you have.

A great deal of Hashem's relationship with Am Yisrael is based on din. The Torah is full of law, punishment, and earned rewards. It is a system of justice, a legal system, halacha. But at the core of Hashem's relationship to us, which is beyond the law, the relationship is chesed. Chesed is an amazing love, mercy, attachment, and a will to shower goodness and blessings on all people and especially on the Jewish People. This is the essence of our relationship with Hashem.

This also is at the essence of our view of a fellow Jew. Sometimes, when we look at a Jew, we might pass harsh judgment on him. He doesn't measure up according to halacha, according to din. Sometimes Jews are tzaddikim, very righteous, because they follow the law perfectly. Others, God forbid, are resha'im, wicked people, and face severe consequences in Torah law. At the essence of the Jew, however, there is a boundless attachment and ability to express chesed. Just as when you come closer to God's essence you get closer to chesed, so too the closer you get to the core of a Jewish soul the more chesed you can see.

God told Moshe that He was about to go into Mitzrayim to save the Jewish People. There were two parts to the plan. Firstly, He would save the Jewish People. Moreover, He would punish the Egyptians for their atrocities and wickedness. Saving the Jewish People could have happened through din if they had deserved it, or through chesed if they didn't. Punishing the Egyptians, however, had nothing to do with chesed. The punishment of the Egyptians would be due to din alone.

The Name of God Associated with the Exodus

Moshe started off by asking Hashem what the basis would be for saving the Jewish People. Would it be din? Did they deserve it, did justice demand it? Or would it be kindness?

So, Moshe asked, "What is Your name?" Why and how are the Jewish People going to leave Egypt? Is it through justice or kindness?

Hashem answers, "*Ehkeh asher ehkeh*, I will be what I will be." This is similar to the more common, four-letter name, albeit in a different form. God is pure goodness and eternity itself. Hashem would bring the redemption because of His loving-kindness for the Jews. God has mercy on them and does not want them to totally degenerate in Egypt.

Hashem says to Moshe, "Call My name and they will listen to you." Then He adds, "I will punish the Egyptians, and every Jew will be able to take out gold and silver." While the gold and silver benefit the Jews, this also clearly is a punishment for the Egyptians. This indicates that God is activating His din as well.

Thus, there appears to be a contradiction in God's statement. He will take out the Jews with kindness and simultaneously punish the Egyptians. Accordingly, Moshe contends that the Jews will be confused. The people have three reasons to believe they don't deserve redemption. The time for redemption has not yet come; they have evil deeds; they have served idols.

God answers that He has mercy. So, the people will then ask: If so, why is God punishing the Egyptians? He is compensating us for our work by giving us their wealth. It seems to be an accounting.

Do we deserve God to change history for us? Do we deserve Him taking us as His chosen people from among the whole world?

Today's Arguments Against the Chosen People

Until today, other peoples have argued that according to strict justice, the Jewish People do not deserve to be God's chosen people. For centuries, Catholicism was adamant that God has abandoned the Jews. Nowadays, Islam claims the same. Ironically, Christianity, which claims to be the religion of love, asserts that God has rejected the Jews. But why would the God of love abandon His people because they are not deserving? This is a glaring paradox within their argument. We know that God relates to our people with loving-kindness and mercy and does not abandon us even when we, God forbid, abandon Him.

Today's extreme forms of Islam feel that God uses only justice in this world, not love. They are absolutely wrong. God indeed uses love in this world even more than justice. Love is at the core of Hashem's middos. In His great love

for the Jews, He never abandons us.

Back in Egypt, the Jews were confused. They asked, “If God is taking us out with love, why is He punishing the Egyptians?” The truth is that God was using both middos. With Jews, He would use pure mercy and love, and with the Egyptians, He would use din. He would take the Jews out even though they didn’t deserve to leave, as a father or mother does things for a child even though the child doesn’t deserve it. Look at the dedication of the mother who wakes up every night to change her baby’s diaper. The child doesn’t deserve it. I once read that the value of the housework of a mother is about \$250,000 a year. This is aside from the love and personal care that she brings to the house, which is priceless.

The kindness and mercy of a father and mother is at the root of our relationship with Hashem. This started with the avos and continued to the nation of their children. Hashem said, “*B’ni bechori Yisrael, The Jews are My firstborn son*” (Shemos 4:22). This expression of God’s mercy for His own child rises above what is deserved, just like a father loves his child beyond any logic. He will do what he can for his child when he is suffering. This is chesed.

But when it came to His interaction with the Egyptians, Hashem replaced chesed with din. “You are wicked,” God said to the Egyptians. “You were not told to be the enforcers against My people. No one appointed you, Pharaoh, to be the jailer and enforcer of God’s justice.” God’s justice protests that the Egyptians hurt the Jews more than the Jews deserved. They threw Jewish babies into the river. They beat Jewish slaves to death in the slime pits of Egypt. This was the cause of Divine justice against them.

This is why today’s Islamic jihadists are totally wrong when they say that they will punish the Jews in the name of God’s justice. No one can appoint himself to be God’s executioner. The Rambam states this explicitly when discussing why the Egyptians were punished (Hilchos Teshuva 6:5). Hashem did not instruct the Egyptians to act as His enforcers. Yes, the Jews were supposed to be punished. But God takes care of His children in His own way. If a boy misbehaves, do parents want their neighbors to punish their own child? No parent would be that stupid! Even a grandparent has no right to enforce the law on a child. Only parents have that right! The Egyptians had no right to punish the Jews for idolatry or other aveiros. Even if Jews were hitting one another and informing on one another, no one other than their God had the right

to punish them. The Egyptians therefore deserved to be punished. This is the Rambam’s opinion. Justice demanded that the Egyptians be punished. The Exodus then turned out to be a double platform. Hashem expressed kindness for the Jews and punishment for their Egyptian taskmasters.

The Three Signs—Chesed, Din, and Rachamim

Moshe thought that the Jews would not understand this double message. This was his intention when he said that the Jews would not listen to him. Hashem then responded with the three signs: the stick that turned into a snake; a hand becoming leprous and then being healed, and the water turning into blood. Each of these signs came to counteract the claims of the Jewish People that they didn’t deserve redemption from the perspective of din.

Hashem explained to Moshe that, even within justice, there is a concept of chesed together within din. In Chassidus, this is called rachamim. Avraham represents chesed, pure kindness. Yitzchak is din, pure justice. And Yaakov is rachamim. We can translate rachamim as merciful justice or justified mercy, a combination of the two perspectives.

Hashem told Moshe, “You will teach them that there are combinations. I can have mercy on the Jews and visit strict justice upon the Egyptians at the same time, and it is not contradictory.”

The first claim was that 400 years hadn’t passed. God gave the leprosy sign to Moshe, noting how quickly his hand became leprous and then reverted to normal. Leprosy is a disease that normally takes a long time to develop. It then takes many weeks to heal, as is clear from Parshas Tazria. In Moshe’s case, though, it went from healthy skin to leprosy instantly, and then it instantly healed. Time defines and limits things. Justice and halacha depend on time. For example, when we light Shabbos candles at 4:14, Shabbos starts at exactly 4:32. Din is narrow and defined. But the chesed of Hashem is beyond and independent of time. Something that normally develops over the course of years can take place in a few months or even in a few moments with divine chesed. This sign signaled that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt soon, even though the preordained time had not yet arrived. Hashem is *mekapeitz al hageva’os* (Shir HaShirim 2:8). Hashem will jump over the mountains to redeem Israel, unfettered by the boundaries of time.

Chazal say that the greatest event in Jewish history, the anticipated coming of Mashiach, can come either *b’ita*, at

its appointed time, or *achishena*, in a moment. The Chafetz Chaim had his bags packed for *achishena*, because he understood that God jumps over mountains to redeem Israel. This is the message of the leprosy on the hand of Moshe.

The Jews' second claim was that they had done too many bad deeds. The sign of water turning into blood directly addressed this objection. What is blood? According to Chassidus, blood represents a combination of water and fire. Blood connects the soul (fire) with the body (water). In order to connect an otherwise dead body with the living soul, we need blood. We need this combination in order to maintain the connection between our body and our soul. In Chassidus, water represents *chesed* and fire represents *din*. Thus, blood represents *rachamim*, the combination of *chesed* and *din*.

Bnei Yisrael thought that they didn't deserve to be redeemed because they had so many bad deeds. They felt overwhelmed and wondered how they ever could change. The answer, in the form of miraculous blood, is to do one good deed. One good deed performed with conviction—with burning, coursing, fiery red blood—can counter a million bad deeds.

This is the secret of *chesed* and *din*, the combination of mercy and justice, of *rachamim*. God knows that we often have a heavy burden of sins. And God knows that we need His mercy. But we have to behave in a way that elicits His mercy. One great deed of fire and water, of blood, can connect heaven and earth, can bring the soul and body together and connect Hashem to His people.

In the same vein, Hashem commanded the people to perform the *Korban Pesach*, a *mitzva* that involves blood. The message was clear—you will deserve to be redeemed despite the sins of hundreds of years in Egypt. This is the great power of one good deed—to overpower, through *rachamim*, all of the bad deeds that came before it.

The sign of the snake addresses the objection regarding idolatry. The Jews said that God couldn't possibly be ready to redeem them because their *avoda zara* filled the land. Ironically, the ubiquity of idolatry in Egypt made it easy to overcome. The snake of the third sign carried the poison of idolatry. Moshe grabbed it by its tail and turned it back into a stick. Because there was so much idolatry, God said, the Jewish People could turn it into a stick. They could run away from the evil they knew so well and thereby become righteous, God-fearing believers.

The famous pasuk says "*Sur mei'ra va'asei tov*. Go away from evil and do good" (Tehilim 34:15). Sometimes, though, it is difficult to do both of these things. In that case, says the Shem Mishmuel, just stop doing evil. You may not feel you have the strength to do good. Then just stop the evil, and Hashem will help you do good. It will truly be a miracle! Moshe told the Bnei Yisrael, "Just stop serving idols, and you will see that you will find Hashem so quickly. He will find you. If you stop the evil, good will come rushing towards you. *Sur mei'ra* will create the *asei tov*."

Sometimes, we are so deeply embroiled in our misguided ways, we think that it is impossible to turn around and do good. The message of the snake-stick sign is to just stop the evil, and then the good will come forth on its own. Throw away the snake and it will turn into a stick. The Shem Mishmuel says Hashem wanted Moshe Rabbeinu to truly understand this idea. He wanted Moshe to explain to the Jewish People that spiritual-based depression is inappropriate. God also has mercy, *chesed*. That mercy may just be *chesed* without *din*. Sometimes, the mercy contains both *chesed* and *din* in it, that is, *rachamim*. Bnei Yisrael will leave Egypt with a combination of *chesed* and *din*, with *rachamim*.

The Final Redemption

Sometimes we feel depressed regarding our present situation in the Land of Israel. How will we ever get out of this precarious situation? We are too embroiled in our sins, especially *sinas chinam*. We cannot extricate ourselves from it. How can God redeem us? We don't deserve it.

This is an incorrect attitude according to Chassidus. We must be optimistic. Even if we don't deserve it, Hashem will redeem us anyway because of His love for us as a father for his child. Hashem has boundless and unconditional love for His Jewish children. We also need to have confidence in ourselves that we will stop the evil and that *asei tov* will come forth. We will do one good thing with fiery energy that will be the merit for us to evoke God's *rachamim*.

Midas hadin by itself may never redeem Israel; but it is completely unnecessary. We were redeemed from Egypt with *chesed* and *rachamim*. The Jewish People will be redeemed from its horrible exile of nearly 2,000 years as well. The final great redemption of Israel will come quickly in our days, *b'chesed u'v'rachamim!*

The Road to Heresy is Paved With Ingratitude

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given at Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on Jan 7, 2021)

In this week's Parsha, Paro says *Lo yadasi es Hashem ve-gam es Yisroel lo ashale'ach*. He denies knowing G-d. How does Paro reach such a place where he doesn't even acknowledge the existence of Hashem? As the Neviim tell us: *Ha-tanin ha-gadol ha-rovetz be-toch ye'oro asher omer li ye'ori ve-ani asisini*. Paro thinks that he created himself and the Nile River. He thinks that he is the king of the entire universe and forgets that there is Someone above. How did Paro reach such a state? The Midrash Raba says that Hashem is not the first one Paro didn't acknowledge in this week's Parsha. Before Paro said *lo yadasi es Hashem*, the Chumash tells us *va-yakam melech chadash al Mitzraim asher lo yada es Yosef*—he didn't know Yosef. Chazal tell us that he denied his debt of gratitude to Yosef. Says the Midrash Raba here: *Amar Rebi Avin, mashal le-echad she-rogam ohavo shel ha-melech. Amar ha-melech hitizu es rosho, ki le-machar ya-ase bi kach. Le-kach kasav alav ha-mikra ke-lomar ha-yom asher lo yada es Yosef, le-machar hu asid lomar lo yadasi es Hashem*. A mashal of someone who disrespected and denigrated the king's friend. The king says: Off with his head. Because tomorrow he will insult me. Paro first forgot Yosef and then ended up forgetting Hashem.

I heard in the name of Rav Soloveitchik that the yesod of Paro's spiritual downfall was a lack of hakaras ha-tov. Yosef, representing the Jewish People, did so much for him. Mitzrayim was so indebted to him. However, people don't like being indebted. They don't like to remember how much they owe other people. They don't like to remember that they are dependent on others. First, he denied that he was dependent. He denied his debt of gratitude to basar ve-dam—flesh and blood human being. Philosophically, it is possible not to feel gratitude to flesh and blood human beings, but to properly acknowledge Hashem—the Master and the Creator of the Universe. But psychologically, in real life, if I don't appreciate what a person standing before me—whom I can see with my eyes, hear with my ears, touch with my fingers—does for me, then how will I appreciate Hashem, whom I can neither touch, see, or hear—and whose existence can only be deduced and experienced on a spiritual level? The road to kefirah is paved with kefias tova—a lack of hakaras ha-tov.

The road to emunah, therefore, goes down the path of hakaras ha-tov. If I appreciate what everyone else does for me, then I will appreciate that I am needy and dependent. Even if I am an atheist now, if I will appreciate what people do for me, I will naturally find my way to Hashem Yisborach. And if I, unfortunately, can't even appreciate people right now and deny what others do for me, then in the end—even if I am not there yet, even if right now I seem very religious—I will deny Hashem as well. This is really the deepest level of Derech Eretz kadma le-Torah. Hashem gave us an obligation of gratitude to others. Just like Ramban and others say that we respect our parents as a training ground to respecting our Ultimate Father in Heaven, we are obligated to notice what other people do for us. We must appreciate, express our gratitude, and acknowledge our dependency on others—however hard that may be. Because the only way to truly be religious is to recognize that I am not in charge. I don't take care of myself. I am needy. And if so, I ultimately recognize that what I really need is Hashem Yisborach.

The Rav said a bold drash. The Gemara debates what is the proper lashon of the bracha when Hashem finally sent us rain after a long drought. And we pasken that we end with *Baruch rov ha-hodaos*, not *Baruch kol ha-hodaos*. What does *Baruch rov ha-hodaos* mean? The Rav explained: *Rov* doesn't mean a lot. *Rov* is halachic concept. It means 'most' as opposed to 'all.' We bless Hashem—to whom we owe most of our thanks. What does that mean? The Rav explained that if we give all our thanks to Hashem, we would be in big trouble. If we only thank Hashem and forget to thank human beings, we will end up forgetting Hashem as well. And why would we want to only thank Hashem? Because we don't like to acknowledge that we owe anyone anything. It's easy to pay lip service to Hashem because we can't see Him. But we really don't like to be dependent and acknowledge that we need others. And if we don't acknowledge that we need the flesh-and-blood others, we will end up like Paro and say *Lo yadati es Hashem*. *Baruch rov ha-hodaos*—give most thanks to Hashem. But remember that Hashem wants us to appreciate all those human beings around us as well. So take a second and third look and recognize what they

are doing for us, how important they are in our lives, and how without them we would be worse off. Go around and say: Thank you, thank you—I appreciate what you do for me. Give a *miyut hodaos* to Hashem's sh'luchim. And

Orthodox Jews and Tikun Ha'olam

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Moshe our greatest leader, would, one day, scale the heavens and split the seas. A young stutterer evolved into one of the greatest orators of history. Deprived of food and drink for forty days, he conveyed the word of a Heavenly God to a human audience waiting on a billowing mountain below. Yet, Moshe wasn't chosen for his scholarship, remarkable faith, or unusual courage. He was selected because of his compassion for human suffering and his moral indignance at the sight of injustice.

Three consecutive episodes from his early career, outline Moshe's unusual moral conviction. In the first scene, he walks away from the posh and padded comforts of his Egyptian palace, to commiserate with Jewish slaves, subjugated by Egyptian persecution. He could easily have ignored this ugliness, and insulated himself within his palace luxury, but a compassionate man does not hide from human suffering.

During his compassionate outing he witnesses a Jew being whipped by an Egyptian, and realizing that no one will assist the victim, Moshe daringly executes the Egyptian. Witnessing human suffering, Moshe commits a capital offense, which endangered both his life and his future career.

The next day he accidentally stumbled upon a squabble between two Jews, which was quickly degenerating into a brawl. On this day he was just casually strolling through Egypt without any moral agenda or without any specific plan to study the suffering of his brothers. He could have easily looked the other way, not to be disturbed by this nuisance. Furthermore, as a fugitive, his best plan was laying low and keeping a low profile. It was not advisable to intervene in a petty squabble between two spiteful Jews.

Yet, once again, he cannot stand by idly while two Jews descend into self-destructive hatred and violence. Years of slavery-induced frustration were now being vented between these two quarreling Jewish slaves. Such is the nature of abuse: victims always victimize other weaker

thereby, we will always be in a place to give *rov ha-hodaos* to Hashem and remember that we really do not take care of ourselves. We are dependent on others, and chief among them, of course, is the source of all goodness—Hashem.

victims, perpetuating cycles of hatred and violence which wrecks the social fabric. Moshe cannot tolerate this self-sabotaging behavior and attempts to defuse the conflict. Sadly, his efforts are met with sarcasm and disdain and, realizing that his murder of an Egyptian official is public knowledge, Moshe quickly bolts for the safe havens of Midyan.

Arriving in this asylum, Moshe visits the local watering-well where he observes women being denied water privileges by stronger and more aggressive male shepherds. Once again, the wiser and more calculated option is to quietly disappear into the woodwork, thereby avoiding any further confrontation or any unwanted publicity. Once again, Moshe simply cannot refrain from a moral response and, despite personal danger, he rescues the harassed women from the local bullies.

The common thread of all these stories is Moshe's compassion for the underdog and his moral indignation toward injustice. Whether facing the brutality of slavery, the futility of self-inflicted strife, or the victimization of weaker members of society, Moshe will not back down and will not tolerate discrimination or exploitation.

Belief and Acts

Judaism doesn't differentiate between faith and charity, and it doesn't separate religious faith from good "works". We study Hashem's word, speak with Him in prayer, and partner with him in history. Additionally, we trace His moral energy in our world and fashion our own personalities in His moral spirit. Through simple acts of kindness, we discover Hashem and learn more about Him. Even before Moshe gapes at the mystery of the burning bush, he encounters Hashem through intrepid acts of moral courage. Before his eyes gaze upon a blazing bush, his heart must burn with moral compassion. He discovers Hashem in charity and kindness before he ascends the mountain to encounter Him and receive His word.

A Caring Society

Acts of kindness are not just the catalyst for Moshe's discovery of Hashem. These noble traits will, one day, form the cornerstone of the model society Moshe will construct.

In the days leading up to the delivery of the divine Torah at Sinai, Moshe assembled a rudimentary judicial system to enforce law and to protect the weak against the strong. Remarkably, in only seven weeks, he transformed a band of lawless slaves into a civil and law-abiding society.

Without the framework of a judicial system in place, we would be incapable of receiving the word of Hashem.

The avot who founded our religion behaved with kindness and generosity and forged a people of compassion. Moshe, however, is the first Biblical figure who specifically defends the weak and the vulnerable from aggression and discrimination. He possesses a special eye for human vulnerability, and for this reason he was chosen as the architect of our nation and of our society.

Restoring a Lost Agenda

For thousands of years, we were disinherited of this crucial feature of Jewish identity. Strawn across foreign lands, often facing persecution and discrimination, we had little ability and, for that matter, little interest, in sculpting a more caring and gentle society. Doing our best just to survive unspeakable horrors and atrocities, the thought of shaping broader society with our "spirit of caring" was an absurd proposition.

Over the past 250 years everything changed, as the Emancipation movement invited Jews back into society, offering them full membership as equal citizens. Though we received equal opportunity to shape policy, remarkably, we exerted disproportionate influence upon the modern evolution toward social equality and justice.

In the 19th and 20th century, Jews piloted the development of Communism, which promised a classless society enjoying universal economic equality. In Capitalist countries, Jews established labor movements to protect factory workers against the dangers of rapid industrialization and the unfair distribution of wealth. Each of these movements reflected our ancient national commitment to equality and social justice. For the first time in thousands of years we were empowered to inspire society with these noble values, and we did not flinch.

Additionally, in 20th century America, Jewish social activism spearheaded the battle against discrimination of racial minorities and of the oppressed. In the wake of the Holocaust, witnessing the horrors of unchecked racism,

our battle against discrimination intensified. In the 20th century, tikun ha'olam became the Jewish anthem of social justice.

Orthodox Jews

The Emancipation of Jews equipped our people with social influence and empowered us to participate in the construction of modern society. However, Emancipation, by welcoming us back into Gentile society, also rapidly accelerated secularization and led to a widespread breakdown of classic halachik observance. Millions of Jews abandoned classic religious experience, often replacing commitment to commandments with commitment to social activism.

Orthodox Jews recoiled at the replacement of commandments and ritual with a substitute agenda of social justice. The perception that other Jews had formed a ritually hollowed out religion centered upon tikun ha'olam created negative associations both with the phrase and with the general value of social activism. The term tikun ha'olam did not feel holy or pious and Orthodox Jews often ignored the value of social reformation.

Orthodox Jews must take care not to overact. Recognizing that we inhabit many worlds, we cannot build religious identity exclusively on the social activism and the repair of this world. Torah study and religious commandments are eternal elements of the many worlds we inhabit. Just the same, our national heritage is to care deeply about creating a caring society which protects weaker members who cannot fully defend their own interests.

In Israel, political polarization has created a similar Orthodox inattention toward social justice agendas. Disinterested in traditional religion and opposed to the politics of settling Greater Israel, secular Israelis enthusiastically adopted social equality and justice at the heart of their platforms. Almost reflexively, and in reaction to the secular focus upon social activism, religious Jews dropped this agenda, focusing instead on settling the land and inspiring Israeli society with a religious flavor.

Sometimes, in our overreaction we forget how deeply ingrained social activism is within our national identity. Caring about the weak appears at the top of Moshe's resume and it should be an important part of ours as well.

“And A Man Went”

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week's parsha, Parshas Shemos, the Torah narrates the Egyptian enslavement which embittered the lives of the Israelites, broke their bodies and spirit (Rashi to Ex.1:13 and Ex.6:9, respectively) and ultimately led to a period of infanticide when all baby boys born were thrown into the river (1:22).

Into the context of this harrowing and terrible time, the Torah informs us of the story of a man and a woman (who remain unnamed) and the birth of their son (who also initially remains unnamed). וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ, מִבֵּית לֵוִי; וַיִּקַּח, אֶת-בֵּת - לְוִי - *And a man from the house of Levi went, and he took (i.e.: married) a daughter of Levi, and she conceived and bore a son* (Shemos 2:1-2). When the child was born, the house was filled with light (Rashi to v.2) - a foreshadowing of the light that would beam from Moshe's face when he came down from Mt. Sinai upon receiving the Torah (34:29-35).

Moshe's entire story, his life and destiny, are announced with the words: וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ, *and a man went* (2:1). Not to be ignored or overlooked is the similarity to the launching of the life and career of Avraham Avinu, the father and founder of the Umah Yisraelis. ... וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-אַבְרָם, לֵךְ-לְךָ. *And Hashem said to Avram: Journey to yourself (for yourself) ... to the land that I will show you* (Bereishis 12:1).

What does the Torah teach us by introducing the lives of these two giants - Avraham and Moshe - with the verb 'lech', 'to go, to journey forth, to walk, to move forward'? In his Unlocking the Torah Text Bereishit, Rabbi Shmuel Goldin writes, "Lech licha literally means 'go for yourself' and is understood by Rashi to imply 'for your benefit and your good.' Vayeleich, on the other hand, (the word used to introduce us to the Moshe narrative), is open ended, without the reflexive reference of 'for yourself'.

"Avraham's life unfolded before the Jewish nation was born and was defined by the personal journeys of the patriarchs, matriarchs and their families. It was a time of the 'yachid', the individual. Hence, Avraham's life is defined by the individual commandment lech licha, a charge towards personal growth and accomplishment.

"With Moshe's birth and the dawn of the national era, however, success becomes measured not only in personal terms but in communal terms as well. Moshe leads others; that is his primary role. Moshe will 'go' and others will

follow. While 'lech licha' (as told to Avraham) entails response to a commandment from G-d, 'vayeilech' (and Amram went and took Yocheved and Moshe was born) reflects self-motivation and initiative on the part of man ...

"G-d's willingness to overtly direct the course of Jewish history apparently diminishes as the nation matures. Lech Licha is transformed into vayeilech. In incremental fashion our own initiative will determine the course of our lives and our nation's history.

"How appropriate, therefore, that the verb la'lachet, which is used in the text to capture the lives of both Avraham Avinu and Moshe Rabbeinu and to make the transition from one to the other, eventually becomes the root of the word halacha, the term that identifies and categorizes Jewish law. Across the ages, the descendants of Avraham and the spiritual descendants of Moshe will not wait for a sign from above to indicate G-d's design. They will, instead, take the initiative to determine that design - that of Jewish law - through the study, interpretation, application, and observance of G-d's law, a law that continues to develop through a partnership between G-d and man. Involvement in the halacha will indicate how 'to go', the path we must walk and the ways we must follow, as its adherents are guided along the path of continued spiritual growth and development" (Unlocking the Torah Text Bereishit, p.14-16).

While Avraham lived as an individual and he was commanded to 'go for yourself', Moshe launched a new era. He was, literally, living for the klal, the community and the nation. His journey was one of initiative to help others, teach others, pray for others, and do for others. This is the mission of every great leader, dedicated and committed to tzarhei tzibbur and the betterment of the klal. It is no longer sufficient, once the national era was launched, to live solely for oneself. A Jew must always 'go' to help others as well.

How fascinating, inspiring and poignant that at the very end of Moshe's life we are told: וַיֵּלֶךְ, מֹשֶׁה; וַיְדַבֵּר אֶת-הַדְּבָרִים: אֶל-כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל *and Moshe went and he spoke all these words unto all of Israel, and he said to them:* בְּן-מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים: שָׁנָה אֲנֹכִי הַיּוֹם--לֹא-אוּכַל עוֹד, לְצֵאתָ וּלְבוֹא *I am one hundred and twenty years old today, I am no longer able to go out and come in* (Devarim 31:1-2).

His mission complete, Moshe takes leave of the nation with the word that launched his life וַיֵּלֶךְ. As if to teach us that his entire 120 years was one long continuum of going, working and doing for the nation. And when he could no longer do so, then his life was truly over.

At the end of his life, Rav Pam zt"l (Rav Avrohom Yaakov HaKohen Pam, 1913-2001, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshivas Torah Vodaas), told his grandson that while he felt bereft of pleasure from life due to his inability to study Torah, it was worth living if he could still help another Jew in some way. That very day, he was able to procure funds for someone in dire need, and was able to present the man with a check for \$1,800. "When the man arrived some ten minutes later, Rav Pam handed him the check and said 'Here is

three months' rent.' He then kissed the man's hand and blessed him. The man was overjoyed. When the man left, Rav Pam was exceedingly happy and he said, "Today was an accomplished day! Now I can go lie down" (Rav Pam, Artscroll, p.478).

While we all must strive to emulate Avraham's personal journey and better ourselves each and every day - lech licha, go to - and for - yourself - we can never forget that Moshe's life launched a nation. A nation that we are all part of, and where all of Israel are guarantors for one another. And so, Moshe's life begins with מִבֵּית לְוִי אִישׁ, מְבִית לְוִי, and ends with מְשָׁה, מְשָׁה. For his entire life was one of going, and doing, for others.

The Thankless Job

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

Parshas Shemos tells of the heroism of Shifra and Pu'a – Benei Yisrael's midwives who defied Pharaoh's command to kill every newborn boy. In reward for their courageous decision to keep the boys alive, the Torah tells, ויעש להם בתים – God "made homes for them" (1:21).

Rashi, based on the Gemara in Maseches Sota, explains the word בתים ("homes") in this pasuk as a reference to dynasties. These women were Yocheved and Miriam – Moshe's mother and sister – and the dynasties of the kehuna, leviya, and kingship descended from them. Yocheved was Levi's daughter, and thus the kohanim and Leviyim descended from her, while the royal line of David Ha'melech descended from Miriam.

Why was this the reward for the midwives' heroism? God normally rewards מידה כנגד המידה, in a manner that resembles the deed that was performed. Why was the midwives' refusal to kill the infants rewarded specifically with the dynasties of leadership?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in Megged Yosef, answers this question by noting the previous pasuk: וייטב אלוקים למילדות, – "God brought goodness upon the midwives; the nation multiplied and became exceedingly numerous." The Torah seems to interrupt the story of God's reward to the midwives by telling us of the nation's continued, rapid population growth. Rav Sorotzkin explains that the phrase ויעש להם בתים implies that this was the midwives' greatest reward – seeing Benei Yisrael's sustained growth. Their sole concern was the wellbeing

of their people; they were not interested at all in any sort of personal reward. The satisfaction of seeing that וירב העם ויעצמו מאד, that Benei Yisrael continued growing, with more and more healthy babies being born, provided them with more joy and satisfaction than any reward could have possibly provided.

When Hashem saw the midwives' selflessness, how their display of courage and self-sacrifice was intended solely for the benefit of the nation, without any ulterior motives, and without any desire for fame or recognition, ויעש להם בתים – He decided that the nation's leadership would descend from these women. The most important quality of a leader is sincerity, a genuine devotion to the people, without any interest in "kickbacks" or prestige. A true leader feels rewarded by seeing his success, by witnessing the benefit he brings to the people under his charge. He does not need any feedback, praise, compliments or public recognition. And so Hashem wanted the leadership of Benei Yisrael to emerge from Shifra and Pu'a, the two women who wanted nothing in return for their self-sacrifice other than the joy of seeing the fruits of their labor.

There are many "thankless jobs" that involve a great deal of work, and tend to invite complaints and criticism, instead of compliments and praise. Personally, in my experience, I am privileged to receive warm, positive feedback for my efforts, but many rabbis do not. The role of gabbai in shul is notorious for its thanklessness; the gabbai puts in time and effort to ensure that everything

runs smoothly, but receives only complaints when he forgot to give someone aliya, without ever receiving a compliment. When one chooses to serve in any sort of leadership position, he must go into it expecting nothing

in return. These roles demand an attitude like Shifra and Pu'a's – seeing the success of one's work as enough of a reward, such that no fame or recognition is needed.

Gratitude, Ingratitude and the Exodus

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

The mitzvot are often divided into two central categories: bein adam la-Makom (between man and G-d) and bein adam la-chaveiro (between human beings). However, the division between the categories is often blurry.

A striking example is the commandment of “You shall walk in His ways (Devarim 28:9),” to imitate G-d, which seems to be bein adam la-Makom. While the obligation to act kindly to others is grounded in the bein adam la-chaveiro mitzvah to love others (see, for example, Rambam Hilchot Avel 14:1), those same commandments are also grounded in our obligation to mimic G-d's acts of kindness. (See Sotah 14a, Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot 8) Thus, treating others properly becomes a bein adam la-Makom expression of an understanding of the way G-d acts.

The Midrash *Sheloshim U'Shtayim Middot* (also known as Midrash Rabbi Eliezer) sees another connection between these two categories of mitzvot, and grounds it in Pharaoh's actions in the opening narratives of Sefer Shemot.

Why does the Torah punish so much those who are ungrateful? It is because ingratitude is like denial of the Holy One Blessed be He. The one who denies the Holy One Blessed be He is also ungrateful. This person is ungrateful to his friend, and tomorrow he will be ungrateful to his Creator.

So too it says of Pharaoh “that he did not know Yosef.” (Shemot 1:8) However, until that day, Egypt had known the kindness of Yosef. However, [it must mean] that he knew but paid no attention and denied his goodness. In the end, he denied the goodness of the Holy One Blessed be He, as it says, “I do not know G-d” (Shemot 5:2) Thus, you learn that being ungrateful is comparable to denying that which is fundamental.

Several fascinating points emerge from this midrash. On one level, it highlights the importance of gratitude. More audaciously, this midrash suggests that the way we treat other people shapes our orientation to G-d. While people may think that one can be “religious” while treating other people improperly, our midrash suggests that often is

not the case. The attitudes that we form affect the way we interact with all, whether people or G-d. Thus, if one fails to recognize the importance of gratitude towards other people, one will be prone to do the same to G-d. When it comes to the latter, this quickly turns into here-sy. If one truly believed in G-d, one could not deny His goodness. The corollary of this is that to deny His goodness is to deny Him!

The midrash continues to establish this character trait as essential to the acceptance of Torah.

So too, the Holy One Blessed be He said to the Jews, “I am Hashem your G-d.” What does this teach? “That I took you out.” (Shemot 20:2) He said to them, “Be careful not to be ungrateful, for one who is ungrateful cannot accept the kingdom of Heaven.” So too, Yehoshua told the Jews: if you are ungrateful for this good, you will be unable to serve G-d...

Rav Saadia Gaon (Emunot V'Deiot, Introduction to Section 3) grounds the rationality of many mitzvot in the concept of gratitude, contending that the idea that one must show appreciation is simply logical. This is true of human relationships as well as in the relationship between man and G-d. Performing mitzvot is part of how we show appreciation.

Thus, it is not simply that to be a fully committed Jew one must attend to the totality of his responsibilities, both interpersonal and those to G-d. Rather, inherent in our psychology is that the way we treat others shapes the kind of people we become. This in turn determines the kind of relationship we are capable of creating with G-d. As both stem from who we are, the effects of a flawed character will manifest in all aspects of our religious life.

Furthermore, as this midrash states, the possibility of accepting the Torah from “the G-d who took us out of Egypt” requires us appreciating that act of kindness, and rejecting the attitude of the taskmaster from whom G-d freed us.

The Making of a Concerned Jewish Leader

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

With the close of the Book of Genesis, the story of Joseph has come to a conclusion. With the arrival of Jacob and his children to the land of Egypt, G-d's prediction to Abraham (Genesis 15) of exile, slavery, and persecution is becoming reality.

This week's parasha, Shemot, formally begins the second book of the Chumash (the Pentateuch), known in English, as the Book of Exodus. The Midrash, the legendary interpretation of the Bible, records that Pharaoh learns from his diviners and soothsayers that a Hebrew male child will soon be born in Egypt who will redeem the Israelites from slavery and destroy Egypt. The Egyptian soothsayers also inform Pharaoh that the Hebrew savior's downfall will be through water.

Determined to save Egypt, Pharaoh decrees, Exodus 1:22: *כָּל הַבֶּן הַיְלֹוֹד, הַיְאֹרָה תִשְׁלֹקֶהוּ*, "Every male child who is born, shall be cast into the river!" Notice the brutal wording of the decree! Typical of virulent anti-Semites, the paranoid Pharaoh, decrees that "every male child"—even Egyptian male children(!), shall be cast into the river. Pharaoh is willing to sacrifice even the Egyptian children, as long as he rids Egypt of the Jewish children.

In order to save the infant Moses, his mother, Yocheved, places him in a reed basket in the river as his sister stands by to see what will be the child's fate. Pharaoh's daughter, (the Midrash tells us that her name is Bithya—daughter of G-d), who is bathing in the river, finds the child, and rescues him. Seeking a nursemaid for the child, she unwittingly delivers him to the child's sister, Miriam, who gives him to his mother, Yocheved, to care for him until he is weaned.

Who is this child Moses, and how does he merit to become the savior of Israel? For insight into these questions, we might approach Steven Spielberg, and question him regarding his creative rendition of the "Prince of Egypt." I suspect, however, that we would do far better by consulting our traditional Jewish sources.

The Midrash says, that when Moses was about two years old, he was sitting on his adoptive mother, Bithya's lap, next to Pharaoh, his adoptive grandfather. Attracted by Pharaoh's glimmering crown, the infant Moses reaches up, removes the crown from Pharaoh's head, and places it on his own head. The Midrash says, that one of Pharaoh's

court advisors, Bilaam (the same Bilaam who eventually tries unsuccessfully to curse the Jews), cries out that the child's actions prove that he is determined to destroy the Egyptian monarchy and that the child must be put to death. Bilaam suggests that the Egyptian wise men be consulted to render judgment. Says the Midrash, the angel, Gabriel, disguised as an Egyptian soothsayer, (other versions maintain that it was Jethro), suggests that the child be tested by putting both a beautiful shiny onyx stone and a hot coal in front of the child. If the child chooses the onyx stone, it will indicate for certain that the child wishes to usurp the royal throne.

While the child naturally is attracted to the glimmering stone, the angel Gabriel redirects the child's hand to the coal, singeing Moses' fingers. The child instinctively places the coal to his mouth, burning his lips, which accounts for Moses becoming a stutterer and slow of speech.

The Torah informs us that when Moses eventually flees from Egypt to Midian, he becomes a shepherd of Jethro's flocks. The Midrash relates that G-d sees how lovingly Moses tends to the sheep, especially one little sheep who runs away to fetch water. The Al-mighty consequently chooses the kindhearted Moses to be the shepherd of His flock, Israel.

These are Midrashim, legends, regarding Moses, but what does the actual Torah text tell us about Moses?

The Torah informs us, Exodus 2:11: *וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אָחָיו*, that when Moses was grown, he went out to his brethren, *וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם*, and he sees their burden. This young man, raised as an Egyptian prince, nevertheless, feels the pain of his Hebrew brothers as his own. Moses encounters an Egyptian smiting a Jew—not for laziness or neglect of work, but for no other reason than for being a Hebrew. When Moses concludes that no one else will intervene to save the Hebrew from certain death, Moses himself smites the Egyptian.

Two other incidents involving Moses' active intervention are recorded in the Torah. First, Moses witnesses a violent quarrel between two Jews, and intervenes. Then, when he arrives in Midian, Moses rescues the daughters of Jethro, who are unfairly chased away from the well by the Midianite shepherds. We see that in the original instance, Moses intervenes in a clash between a

Jew and a non-Jew. In the second instance, he intervenes in a fight between two Jews, and in the third instance, in a quarrel between two non-Jews. In each instance, Moses champions the cause of justice, without regard to race or ethnicity.

Where did Moses develop this exalted sense of justice, which seems so ingrained and natural? Perhaps, it comes from his limited, but intense, training during his formative years, when he was nursed by his mother and cared for by his sister. As the Catholic Church is wont to say (V.I. Lenin, the communist leader expressed a similar principle), “Give me the child for the first five years, and you can have him for the rest of his life.” Those early, formative, years that Moses spent with his biological family were most important, and the values instilled in the child during that period remain ingrained in the child’s persona.

Or, perhaps, there’s another source, an unexpected and often unacknowledged source of Moses’ exalted ethical sense. Could it be that Moses received his training from the Egyptian princess, Bithya? Was she the secret source of his ethical rearing and learning? Some Midrashim actually suggest that eventually Bithya joins the Jewish people, and marries the legendary Kalev ben Jephuneh, who, together with Joshua, were the only two scouts who returned from Canaan with a positive report. Alternatively, the Torah is giving us a first glimpse of people, non-Jewish people, who would later be known as *חַסִּידֵי אֲמוֹת הָעוֹלָם*—Chasiday oomot olam, the righteous gentiles, who, throughout Jewish history, would risk their lives in order to save Jews and were particularly helpful during the Holocaust! Is that, perhaps, the reason why Pharaoh’s daughter is named Bithya, Batya—the daughter of G-d?

It could be, that tradition is purposely ambiguous on this question, because both possibilities are correct! Moses obviously received his rearing as a young child, from his mother and his sister, but also from Bithya. And both of these experiences prove vital.

Surely, this is something for all to ponder.