

A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of the New West End United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam

PARSHAT SHEMOT

DVAR TORAH: A COURAGEOUS HUMAN RESPONSE

What inspired Pharaoh's daughter to save a Jewish child in the midst of an extreme anti-Jewish decree made by her own father?

She definitely didn't think he was Egyptian; she took a look at him and said "This is of the children of the Hebrews" (Shemot 2:6). No one influenced her, and she had nothing to lose by letting the child go. Why did she save him?

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai (Sotah 12b), says that at that point in her life she had already decided to leave her father's idolatrous world. She was a proto-convert and her descent to the Nile to bathe was, in effect, immersion. Immediately after this Avraham-like woman made such a courageous and momentous decision G d presented her with the unique opportunity to save the future savior of her new people.

But the Sforno doesn't work with that assumption. Pharaoh's daughter, he says, was just taking a royal bath in her protected and private area of the Nile. Her decision to save Moshe was made on the spot. She opened the floating crib and saw the baby: What did she see?

The Sforno says that she saw what the child's natural mother saw, "that he was very goodly and very beautiful." She also saw that he was uniquely mature. Even though he was only several months old, he moved like an older child. What went through her mind that caused her to save him? It is such a shame that "a child so beautiful and predisposed for perfection should be tossed into the Nile." Chaval! What a waste!

So she saved him despite his Jewishness (not, according to the first approach, because of his Jewishness). That human response, that someone so precious looking should not just drift away, overcame other factors dictating that she passively let the baby die. She courageously ignored her background, her father's influence, and a possible death penalty. The boy's sister Miriam seized the opportunity, Moshe was nursed by Yocheved, and Moshe – drawn out of the water – became, eighty years later, Moshe Rabbeinu – who would draw his people out of the waters.

Pharaoh's daughter displayed, according to Sforno, a fundamental human value, that precious things should not go to waste. That gut reaction is at the core of much of our basic morality. We have valuable resources at our disposal – time, brain-power, physical strength – and it would be a shame if they go to waste.

Not letting precious things go to waste can bring on great things. Once those resources don't go to waste – we do something productive with our time, engage our mind in wisdom, or use our physical power for positive non-wasteful ends – they can be exponentially productive, and we and the world reap the benefits. That's what happened with Pharaoh's daughter. She listened to her conscience and gut feelings, and saved a beautiful and special baby. That blossomed when she raised him and allowed him to develop his unique qualities, and he grew into the most humble individual and the greatest prophet the world ever saw.

SOURCE GUIDE: THE MOSHE-YITRO CONNECTION

Yitro merited having Moshe Rabbeinu as a son-in-law. This is surprising. How did a Midianite priest end up becoming the father-in-law of Am Yisrael's king and savior, Hashem's greatest prophet? An essay by Harav Chaim Sabato, שליט"א of Maaleh Adumim on our parshah (Ahavat Torah, Parshat Shemot, pp. 103-107), explores the Moshe-Yitro connection and forms the basis of this source guide.

A. "Bring Him in to Eat"

One sentence brought about the connection between Yitro and Moshe. Yitro's daughters returned home earlier than usual. When he asked why, they said that an Egyptian man had saved them from the shepherds that would usually harass them. Yitro's response:

<p>1. Shemot 2:20 He said to his daughters, "But where is he? Why did you desert the man? Call him in so he can eat bread."</p>	<p>שמות ב:כ וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל בְּנֹתָיו וַאֲיוֹ לָמָּה זֶה עָזַבְתֶּן אֶת הָאִישׁ קְרָאֵן לוֹ וַיֵּאכַל לֶחֶם.</p>
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Yitro chided his daughters: How is it possible not to show appreciation and gratitude to someone who saved you? You must call him in to join us for a meal. Moshe came and eventually married Yitro's daughter, and Yitro eventually joined Israel in the desert and became the prototypical convert.

B. "Can I Go to Egypt?"

Moshe in return displays his appreciation for Yitro:

<p>2. Shemot 4:18 Moshe went and returned to Yeter his father-in-law and said to him, "I will please go and return to my brothers in Egypt and see if they are still alive." Yitro said to Moshe, "Go in peace." Rashi on Shemot 4:18 Moshe went and returned to Yeter his father-in-law – to get permission, for he had taken an oath not to leave Midian without Yitro's permission (Mechilta).</p>	<p>שמות ד:יח וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיָּשָׁב אֶל יֶתֶר חוּתְנוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אֲלֵכֶּה נָא וְאֶשׁוּבָה אֶל אֶחָיו אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶרְאֶה הַעֲוֹדִים חַיִּים וַיֹּאמֶר יֶתֶרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה לָּךְ לְשָׁלוֹם. רש"י על שמות ד:יח וישב אל יתר חותנו - ליטול רשות שהרי נשבע לו (שלא יזוו ממדין כי אם ברשותו) (מכילתא).</p>
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Moshe had a debt of gratitude towards Yitro: Yitro opened his home to Moshe and Moshe married his daughter. Even after receiving his Divine mission, he (surprisingly) requests Yitro's permission to leave Midian.

Moshe's gratitude extends even to inanimate objects. Aharon performed the first three plagues instead of Moshe. Why?

<p>3. Rashi on Shemot 7:18 "Tell Aharon" – Because the Nile protected Moshe when he was thrown into it, it therefore was not smitten through him, neither in the plague of blood or frogs. Instead it was smitten through Aharon.</p>	<p>רש"י על שמות ז:ט אמור אל אהרן - לפי שהגין היאור על משה כשנשלך לתוכו לפיכך לא לקה על ידו לא בדם ולא בצפרדעים ולקה על ידי אהרן.</p>
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See also Rashi's similar comment on Shemot 8:12.

C. Ungrateful Pharaoh

In sharp contrast, Pharaoh and the Egyptian people who followed him excelled in their lack of gratitude. Yosef had saved his country from a bitter famine, yet Pharaoh enslaved and tortured Yosef's People:

<p>4. Shemot 1:8 A new king arose in Egypt who did not know Yosef.</p> <p>Rashi on Shemot 1:8 who did not know – He made himself as if he did not know him.</p>	<p>שמות א:ח וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף.</p> <p>רש"י על שמות א:ח אשר לא ידע - עשה עצמו כאלו לא ידע.</p>
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D. Gratitude and G-d

The contrast between Yitro and Pharaoh deepens when we compare how each of them relates to G-d:

<p>5. Shemot 5:2 Pharaoh said: Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice to send the People of Israel? I do not know Hashem and I will also not send Israel.</p> <p>Shemot 18:10 Yitro said: Blessed is Hashem Who saved you from the hands of Egypt and from the hand of Pharaoh, Who saved the nation from under the hand of Egypt.</p>	<p>שמות ה:ב וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה מִי ה' אֲשֶׁר אֶשְׁמַע בְּקוֹלוֹ לְשַׁלַּח אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא יָדַעְתִּי אֶת ה' וְגַם אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶשְׁלַח.</p> <p>שמות יח:י וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ בְּרוּךְ ה' אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶתְכֶם מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וּמִיַּד פַּרְעֹה אֲשֶׁר הִצִּיל אֶת הָעָם מִתַּחַת יַד מִצְרַיִם.</p>
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Gratitude to is at the core of our relationship to G-d. Gratitude towards people is the stepping stone:

<p>6. Midrash Hagadol Shemot 1:8 Anyone who has gratitude towards (literally, recognizes the good of) his friend will in the end have gratitude towards G-d; and anyone who does not have gratitude towards (literally, denies the good of) his friend will in the end not have gratitude towards G-d.</p>	<p>מדרש הגדול שמות א:ח כל המכיר בטובתו של חברו, סופו מכיר בטובתו של מקום. וכל הכופר בטובתו של חברו, סופו כופר בטובתו של מקום.</p>
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E. Gratitude and the Egyptians

Pharaoh was not the only ungrateful Egyptian: the chief butler also forgot Yosef (Bereishit 40:23) and the entire Egyptian nation shared Pharaoh's blind spot towards Yosef's goodness and joined in torturing and enslaving the Children of Israel. Yet one of the 613 mitzvot is for us as Jews to remember the goodness done to us by the Egyptians!

<p>7. Devarim 23:8 ... Do not abhor an Egyptian for you were a stranger in his land.</p> <p>Haamek Davar on Devarim 23:8 For you were a stranger in his land. This is also a character trait of lofty souls, to do good and not to be ungrateful, a trait which is referred to as despicable (נבל). Therefore the Holy One, blessed be He, accustomed us through this mitzvah.</p>	<p>דברים כג:ח ... לֹא תִמְעַב מִצְרִי כִּי גֵר הָיִיתָ בְּאֶרֶץוֹ</p> <p>העמק דבר על דברים כג:ח כי גר היית בארצו. גם זה מתכונת הנפש המעלה לגמול טובה ולא להיות כפוי טובה ונקרא נבל. ע"כ הרגיל הקב"ה אותנו במצוה זו.</p>
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Gratitude is a key component of a number of other mitzvot; like kibud av vaem, honoring parents, and birkat hamazon, the blessing said after a meal. When Avraham Avinu's guests would thank him for his hospitality he encouraged them to extend their gratitude to the Creator of all, to in effect say a birkat hamazon.

REVEALING THROUGH EXILE BY RABBI FYVEL SHUSTER

The Torah starts off the world of Sefer Shemos with the letter "Vav" – "ויאלה שמות" – "And these are the names" (Shemot 1:1). Why begin the Book with the word "and"? Chazal say, "מוסיף על הראשונים" – "ויאלה" – that the extra 'and' indicates that this list of names adds to the original list that appeared in the end of Sefer Bereishis (46:8). Chazal say in the Midrash that in this list נקראו על שם גאולתם – the names here are those of their redemption, whereas the names of Bereishis were those of גלות, of exile. Indeed, Shemos is referred to as the ספר הגאולה, the Book of Redemption. But what are "names of exile and redemption"?

The purpose of גלות, says the Sfas Emes, is related to the word לגלות, to reveal. Just as a גלגל, a wheel, as it turns, reveals its different sides, its different facets, the purpose of Hakadosh Baruch Hu, the Holy One, blessed be He, putting Am Yisrael into galus is to reveal those facets of their neshamah, their soul, which were there only in potential and had to come out into actuality.

Through galus and geulah a person's true name is expressed. The Sfas Emes points out that the gematria, the numerical equivalent of the Hebrew word for name – שם – equals that of the word for book – ספר. There is a book in which we write with our lives. Hakadosh Baruch Hu places us in the situations that reveal those stories that we have to tell, that reveal the name that is truly ours as we "come to Mitzrayim, to Egypt." In this way, Am Yisrael is able to thank Hashem every year on Pesach for taking us out of Mitzrayim.

But it is not as simple as it seems, because, as the Sfas Emes points out, one could ask the Jew, "Why are you thanking G-d for taking you out of the servitude of Mitzraim? Didn't He also put you there?" The Sfas Emes says that this is because included in the thanks for taking us out of Mitzrayim is the recognition that the entire galus process was important for us.

Just as the galus in Mitzrayim was important for us to become who we really are, so it is with our present ongoing galus. And just as galus is important nationally, so it is on a personal level. Those difficult times in life when we sense הסתר פנים, the hiddenness of the Divine, when despite the demands on us we remain steadfast in our avodah, our service of G-d, reveal hidden facets of our soul, of our strength, of our eternal selves, that are necessary for us and for the Jewish people.

This, says the Sfas Emes, was the image of the burning bush. It showed Moshe Rabbeinu that Hakadosh Baruch Hu was found even in the lowest of places, the סנה, that very low-growing bush. The Shechinah, the Divine Presence, was present even there. When your life takes you to places that are very low, you should know that by revealing that soul which is inside of you, you are also revealing there the Malchus, the Majesty of Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

The Sfas Emes finishes by reminding us of the verse in Michah which says, "כימי צאתך מארץ מצרים אראנו נפלאות" – "As in the days when you went out of Mitzrayim, I will show you wonders" in the coming redemption (Michah 7:15). Just as Hashem saved us then by revealing Himself, as we say in the Hagadah, "עד שנגלה עליהם מלך מלכי המלכים הקדוש ברוך הוא וגאלם" – so, in our days, through the process of revelation and redemption we will see that revelation in the same way both nationally and in our personal lives.

We mourn the tragic deaths of Ofer Ben Ari, הי"ד, and Harav Reuven Birmajer, הי"ד, killed during a terrorist attack last week. We continue to pray for a refuah shleimah, a complete healing, for all those wounded in the attacks against our People.

*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at www.darchenoam.org +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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