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This issue of Harerei Etzion is dedicated by Rivi and Avi Katz in memory of Rivi's mother, Adele Kanarek, ל"ז, in commemoration of her 15th yahrtzeit which was observed this year. "Bomama," as she was affectionately known by her grandchildren, would have been very proud of Dena, Tamar and Shua, who have written דברי תורה in this issue לעילוי נשמתה.

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Dear Yeshivat Har Etzion and Migdal Oz Bogrim and Bogrot,

For many of us, the time that we spent learning in our respective institutions formed part, or much, of our identities as Bnei and Bnot Torah. The values on which these institutions are based continue to guide our lives and inspire us to action in many areas. Of these values, harbatsat Torah, concern for and commitment to the Jewish people and the enterprise of individual and unique Torah study, occupy a central place in our worldview.

In recognition of these principles, we would like to announce a new initiative that we hope will further cement our connection to one another, to our Batei Medrash and to the Torah as a whole. This endeavor, entitled Harerei Etzion, is a monthly publication of divrei Torah on the Parsha written by the faculty of Gush and Migdal Oz, as well as college, graduate and post graduate bogrim and bogrot.

The publication will cover all of the Parshiyot for that particular month and we encourage everyone to sign up for a devar Torah. To sign up for a Parsha, please enter your information [here](#).

We hope that Harerei Etzion becomes a source of vibrant, engaging Torah that strengthens our Yeshiva community and by extension, the Jewish nation as a whole.

Best,

Jacob Bernstein and Tuvy Miller

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BEZEKHUT NASHIM TSIDKANIOT NIGALU: THE MIDWIVES CONTRIBUTION

TAMAR HALPERN MIGDAL OZ '07-'08

In the end of Sefer Bereshit and the beginning of Sefer Shemot, the Torah emphasizes the proliferation of Benei Yisrael. Parashat Vayigash concludes:

“וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן וַיִּחְזְזוּ בָהּ וַיִּפְרוּ וַיִּרְבוּ מְאֹד:”

“Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the region of Goshen; they acquired property in it and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly.”¹

Likewise, Parashat Shemot begins,

“וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְמֵאֹד מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם”


“The children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong- very very much so; and the land became filled with them.”²

Rashi, commenting on the word וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ notes that the six expressions of multiplication illustrate that Jewish women were giving birth to six children at a time. Moreover, there are an additional seven expressions of multiplicity in the first chapter of Parashat Shemot.

1. וַיִּאמֶר אֶל-עֲמוּ הִנֵּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב
2. וַעֲצוּם מְמֹנֵוּ
3. הִבֵּה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ פֶּן-יִרְבֶּה
4. וְכִאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה
5. וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:
6. וַיִּיטֹב אֱלֹקִים לְמִילֵדֹת וַיִּרְבֶּה הָעָם
7. וַיַּעֲצְמוּ מְאֹד

1. Behold, the nation of Benei Yisrael are **MANY**...³
2. and **MIGHTIER** than we⁴
3. Let us then deal wisely with them lest they **MULTIPLY**⁵
4. And the more they afflicted them, the **MORE THEY MULTIPLIED**...⁶
5. and the **MORE THEY GREW**⁷
6. And the nation **MULTIPLIED**...⁸
7. and grew **VERY MIGHTY**⁹

-
- 1 Bereshit 47:27
 - 2 Shemot 1:7
 - 3 Shemot 1:9
 - 4 Shemot 1:9
 - 5 Shemot 1:10
 - 6 Shemot 1:12
 - 7 Shemot 1:12
 - 8 Shemot 1:20
 - 9 Shemot 1:20



The entire first chapter of Parashat Shemot focuses on Pharaoh's efforts to stop this process of rapid growth. At the center of Pharaoh's endeavor are the "מילדת העברית", the midwives.¹⁰ Pharaoh commands the midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill all newborn boys. However, the midwives defy Pharaoh's command and instead enable the growth of Benei Yisrael.

The narrative of the midwives, however, lacks significant details. The Torah tells us that the midwives "caused the boys to live,"¹¹ but it does not explain exactly how they did so, and how they got away with such blatant disregard of Pharaoh's commands. Furthermore, we know nothing about the background of the midwives. In fact, the phrase "מילדת העברית," itself is ambiguous and can grammatically be translated two ways - either as Hebrew midwives or as midwives of the Hebrews. This leads to an obvious question.

Who were the midwives?

There is a debate among the commentaries about the identity of the מילדת. Hazal¹² contend that the midwives were Jewish. In fact, Rashi identifies Shifra and Puah as Yokheved and Miriam.

Similarly, Rashbam maintains that the simplest reading of the phrase "מילדת העברית" is "מייילדות שהם עבריות" to the midwives who were Jewish.

The approach of Rashi and Rashbam fits nicely with the simple reading of the text in the sense that it connects the narrative of the first two chapters of Parashat Shemot. While the first chapter focuses on Pharaoh's decree and the incident with the midwives, the second chapter begins with "בת-לוי"’s attempt to save Mosheh. Rashi and Rashbam remain consistent throughout the narrative that בת-לוי is Yokheved.¹³ Thus, according to Rashi and Rashbam, both the end of the first chapter and the beginning of the second chapter are telling stories about Yokheved.

Nevertheless, other commentaries take the opposite approach and assert that the midwives were Egyptian. According to this approach, "מילדת העברית" is translated as the "midwives of the Hebrews." Abarbanel asks several striking questions that lead him to this conclusion. After the midwives disobey Pharaoh's command, Pharaoh questions them and asks, "Why have you done this thing, that you have caused the boys to live?" The midwives famously answer:

”תֹּאמְרֵן הַמַּיִלְדֹת אֶל-פַּרְעֹה כִּי לֹא כַנְּשִׁים הַמִּצְרִית הָעֵבְרִית כִּי-יְהִיֹת הִנֵּה בְטַרְם תָּבוֹא אֵלֶיךָ הַמַּיִלְדֹת וַיֵּלְדוּ:

“The midwives said to Pharaoh, “Because the Hebrew women are unlike the Egyptian women, for they are experts; before the midwife comes to them, they have given birth.”¹⁴

Abarbanel points out that if the Jewish women were in fact experts at childbirth, they would have had no need for their own midwives! Moreover, how could two midwives have been enough to handle so many births? And finally, why would Pharaoh trust Jewish women to assist in killing their own children? Consequently, Abarbanel offers a radically different reading of the story. According to Abarbanel the midwives must have been Egyptians. Furthermore, he argues that there is no reason to believe that there were only two midwives involved. In fact, Shifra and Puah are not names, but terms that refer to the two tasks of the Egyptian midwives.

10 Shemot 1:15

11 Shemot 1:17

12 Sotah 11b

13 Rashi and Rashbam, Shemot 2:1

14 Shemot 1:19

“אלא שהענין כך הוא שהיה מנהג במצרים שהיו באות שתיים מילדות לעמוד עם כל אשה שהיתה יולדת והאחת מהן היה עסקה בהוצאת הולד ובשכלולו ולכן נקראת שפּרה ע”ש שמשפיר את הולד. והשנית היה עסקה להחזיק ביולדת ולעוזרה בדברים וקולות ותפלות ולכן נקראת פועה מלשון כילודה אפעה ואמר שדבר פרעה למילדות העבריות ר”ל לכולנה כי לא אמר לשתי המילדות אלא לפי שלכל המילדות הרבות ההנהגה דבר וצוה זה וכלן היו נחלקות לשתי אומניות ההם וזה אמרו ששם האחת שפּרה ושם השנית פועה. ולא היו עבריות כי איך יבטח לבו בנשים העבריות שימיתו ולדיהן אבל היו מצריות מילדות את העבריות ר”ל עוזרות אותן ללדת כמ”ש בילדכן את העבריות.”

“Rather the matter is like this- There was a custom in Egypt that two midwives would come to a woman who was giving birth. One [midwife] would engage in the birth of the child and all that pertained to it. And this is why she [the first midwife] was called Shifra, because she would help the child. And the second [midwife] was engaged in holding the mother [who was giving birth] and helping her with things, including prayer. And therefore, she [the second midwife] was called Puah, from the term ‘yoldah afaa’. And when it [the Torah] says that Pharaoh spoke to the midwives, it means to say [he spoke] to all of them because he did not speak only to two midwives, but rather [he spoke] to many midwives and commanded this. And they [the midwives] were all divided up into these two occupations. And this is why it [the pasuk] says that her name was Shifra and her name was Puah. And they were not Jews, because how could he [Pharaoh] trust in his heart that Jewish women would kill their own children. Rather, they were Egyptians. This means to say, they [the midwives] helped the [the Jewish women] give birth. And this is why the Torah says ‘when you deliver the Hebrew women.’”¹⁵

In this context Abarbanel asserts that the midwives’ response to Pharaoh makes more sense. The midwives answer Pharaoh defensively and argue that unlike the Egyptian women who need two midwives to assist them in birth, Jewish women are skilled at immediately attending to the needs of their infants, and thus have no need for midwives at all.

Arguably, Abarbanel’s approach is more logical with the simple reading of the verse and it also resolves many ambiguities within the text. Nevertheless, the approach of Hazal, Rashi and Rashbam may offer more in terms of understanding the larger theme of Sefer Shemot.

After the midwives fear God and defy Pharaoh’s decree, they were rewarded with houses.

וַיְהִי כִּי יִרְאוּ הַמַּיְלֵדוֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹקִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:
Now it took place, when the midwives feared God, that He made houses for them.¹⁶

Again, the verse is vague as to what exactly the reward was. However, according to Hazal and Rashi, who maintain that the midwives were Jewish, this phrase contains meaning and significance beyond its literal interpretation. Based on the Gemara,¹⁷ Rashi comments that “ויעש להם בתים” refers to the houses of priesthood, Levitic and royal families. Remaining consistent throughout the chapter, Rashi¹⁸ asserts that the kehuna- the priesthood, and the Levitic family will descend from Yokheved, and the malkhut- the royal dynasty, will descend from Miriam.

15 Abarbanel, Shemot 1:16

16 Shemot 1:21

17 Sotah 11b

18 On Shemot 1:21



One of the central themes of Sefer Shemot, from the Egyptian exile through Matan Torah at Har Sinai, is the development and formation of Benei Yisrael.

According to Hazal's approach, Yokheved and Miriam's actions as midwives went beyond assisting in the literal proliferation and formation of Am Yisrael. Through leadership and courage, they actively involved themselves in the redemptive process.

Kehunah, Leviyah, and Malkhut signify three structural and spiritual pillars of the Jewish nation. The Midrash attributes these to Yokheved and Miriam, perhaps, to reflect their essential role in the formation of this tripartite structure. Their altruistic and self-sacrificial actions were the first steps on a journey to nationhood that transpires throughout Sefer Shemot. Thus, the famous phrase "BeZekhut Nashim Tsidkaniot Nigalu Mimitsrayim" may refer not only to the role of Jewish women in the redemption from slavery but also to their role in the the creation of Am Yisrael.

MOSHEH RABBENU – AN UNLIKELY LEADER?

JEFF KIDDERMAN YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '05-'06

Mosheh undergoes a massive transformation from the beginning to the end of Parashat Shemot, starting as a baby whose life is in danger and ending as the man tasked with convincing Pharaoh to release an enslaved nation. This transformation raises a simple question - what is it about Mosheh that caused him to be chosen as the leader of Benei Yisrael?

To be fair, it is not always the case that this sort of information is provided to us by the Torah. R. Menachem Leibtag and others note that the Torah tells us next to nothing about Avraham's life before he was chosen by God. Putting aside midrashim that often fill in the blanks on this issue, it seems that at times the Torah tries to limit the discussion of why a particular person deserved to be chosen in order to highlight the reason for which they were chosen.¹

Unlike the presentation of Avraham's life, however, the Torah does contain several episodes recounting the first 80 years of Mosheh's life, the time before he was chosen to lead Benei Yisrael. Due to this contrast, it is likely that there must be some significance or theme to these stories such that the Torah chose to include them. What exactly is that theme that we can analyze to glean information as to why Mosheh was chosen?

The first story of Mosheh is his birth. We are told:²

וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי:

וְתָהָרָה אִשָּׁה וְתֵלֵד בֶּן וְתֵרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי טוֹב הוּא וְתִצְפְּנֶהּוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:

"A man from the house of Levi went and he took the daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son; she saw him that he was good and she hid him for 3 months."

First, it is strange that we are not told who Mosheh's parents are right away. Furthermore, at this point in the Torah it seems highly unusual that the leader of Benei Yisrael should be a descendent of Levi. Our only encounters with Levi thus far have been negative, in particular his massacre of Shekhem³ and the chastisement from Yaakov as a result.⁴ It makes more sense for the leader of Benei Yisrael to descend from Reuven (the actual firstborn), Yehudah (who several times stepped up as a leader),⁵ or Yosef (who already had a history of rising to power in Egypt). There is certainly nothing about an unnamed child from an anonymous family and a cursed tribe that would lead us to believe that this baby will eventually take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

From birth, Mosheh was labeled by his mother as a "good" boy. R. Hirsch⁶ explains that this means that Mosheh did not cry a lot and therefore was easy to hide. Eventually, his mother decided to put him in a basket in the Nile and he was ultimately rescued by Pharaoh's daughter. Although he was given a Hebrew name⁷ and nursed by his biological mother,⁸ it is clear that Mosheh grew up in the palace among Egyptian nobility.⁹ It is probable (though not explicitly stated) that he was aware of his Jewish ancestry, though we do not hear of any identity crisis on Mosheh's part or any conflict with other people in the palace.

1 Tanach.org, Parashat Lekh Lekha: "For What Purpose Did God Choose Avraham?"

2 Shemot 2:1-2. All translations in this devar Torah are mine.

3 Bereshit 34:23

4 Bereshit 49:5-7

5 Bereshit 43:8-10 and 44:28-34

6 Commentary on Shemot 2:2

7 The name "Mosheh" is explained using the Hebrew word meaning "to draw out" in Shemot 2:10

8 Shemot 2:9

9 Shemot 2:10



Despite being raised in an Egyptian home, when Mosheh grew up and wandered beyond the palace it was clear who his “brothers” were:¹⁰

ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו:
“And it came to pass in those days, Mosheh grew up and went out to his brothers and he saw their suffering; he saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man from his brothers.”

This brief story initiates a life-changing series of events for Mosheh. First, he clandestinely killed an Egyptian who was beating a Jewish slave and then he tried to break up a fight among Jews.¹¹ When he found out that his murder of the Egyptian was public knowledge,¹² Mosheh fled to Midian,¹³ seemingly with no plans to return.

Immediately following Mosheh’s arrival in Midian he saved Yitro’s daughters from the Midianite shepherds, earning himself an invitation to Yitro’s table and eventually Yitro’s daughter Tsipporah as a wife.¹⁴

When Mosheh’s new life was interrupted by an encounter with God at the burning bush, Mosheh did not seem interested in the mission God had set out for him. Mosheh refused God’s assignment no less than four times, with a different excuse each time.

Finally, Mosheh ran out of excuses and resorted to just asking God to send someone else:¹⁵

ויאמר בי ה' שלח נא ביד תשלח:

“My Lord – Please send through the one whom you will send.”

God got angry at Mosheh¹⁶ because of this and Mosheh had no choice but to accept the mission. When Mosheh finally returned to Egypt and failed in his first attempt to convince Pharaoh to let Benei Yisrael leave, he immediately turned back to God to complain and ask why he was sent on a failing mission – essentially saying “I told you so.”¹⁷


What emerges from this picture is a character seemingly lacking all of the traits normally associated with a promising leader. Mosheh comes across as a lonely figure (we do not encounter any positive social interactions between him and others in this parasha) who is anonymous, quiet, confused, impulsive, afraid, lacking confidence, and entirely disinterested in being a leader.

R. Hirsch, reflecting on Mosheh’s killing of the Egyptian and flight from Egypt, comments:¹⁸

“He is deeply imbued with a sense of duty to rush to the aid of any innocent person who is oppressed...[but] he is far from [having] the fiery and infectious daring that is required for one to lead a great multitude and urge them along to the hazardous enterprise of breaking their chains and fighting their way to freedom from the tyrant’s yoke.”

Why did God choose such a seemingly unfit leader? Alternatively, why would the Torah go out of its way to give us this impression of Moshe through these stories?

10 Shemot 2:11
11 Shemot 2:13
12 Shemot 2:14
13 Shemot 2:15
14 Shemot 2:16-21
15 Shemot 4:13
16 Shemot 4:14
17 Shemot 5:22
18 Commentary on Shemot 2:12



If we look again at the stories of Mosheh's life, we can see a clear theme that runs through each and every one of them. Mosheh's birth and "rebirth" are the direct result of the compassion and sacrifice of three women. Mosheh's mother put herself in danger by hiding her son, and then risked not being able to ever see him again in order to potentially save his life. Mosheh's sister risked being caught as an accomplice to this crime in order to watch over her baby brother. And Pharaoh's daughter had enough sympathy for this Jewish baby to save his life (defying her own father's decree) and raise the baby in Pharaoh's house.

Similarly, all the stories of Mosheh's life pre-leadership involve Mosheh jumping to the aid of a fellow human being. Whether it is rescuing a Jew from an Egyptian, a Jew from another Jew or Midianite women from selfish shepherds, Mosheh's entire early life is a testament to his compassion.

I once heard an intriguing quote from R. Jonathan Sacks:¹⁹

"If you tell yourself you're unworthy to be a leader of the Jewish people, that's a pretty good sign that you should be a leader of the Jewish people."

This is certainly a quote that describes Mosheh, who is probably one of the only political leaders to ever be described as "very humble, more than all men on the face of the earth"²⁰ and who at his death is called a "servant of God."²¹ Mosheh certainly feels unworthy to be a leader, and we are meant to agree with him at this point in the story. According to what we have read and come to know about Mosheh, it seems he is lacking many key leadership traits and skills. However, as we follow the rest of Humash, we see Mosheh develop many of these traits, including strength, confidence, diplomacy, and willingness to challenge both God and the people.

It seems, however, that the one trait that is a prerequisite for being a Jewish leader is compassion. Not only did Mosheh demonstrate this characteristic, it is implied in his very name. It is interesting that the name used to refer to Mosheh is not the one given to him by his mother during his first three months of life, but rather the one given to him by Pharaoh's daughter. This name, Mosheh – "because I drew him from the water" – is a sign of the compassion that began as Mosheh's blessing and later became his greatest asset.

19 11/28/08 – "The Importance of Leadership" (YUTorah.org)

20 Bemidbar 12:3

21 Devarim 34:5. It is interesting to view this description of Mosheh in light of the fact that he was probably the only Hebrew of all those he led out of Egypt who had not been a servant of Pharaoh.

MISSION: POSSIBLE

BINYAMIN CASPER YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '01-'02

In Parashat Shemot, the Torah records Mosheh's birth but omits any description of Mosheh's lineage, choosing instead to preface his birth with "וילך איש מבית לוי ויקח את בת-לוי"¹ Mosheh's deferred genealogical introduction appears in Parashat Va'era, but at a seemingly peculiar time. The sequence of events is as follows:

6:10-11: Hashem commands Mosheh to return to Pharaoh and demand the release of Benei Yisrael.

6:12: Mosheh then objects, citing his speech impediment.

6:13: Hashem repeats His directive to both Mosheh and Aharon.

6:14-25: At this point, the Torah digresses to speak about the families of Ya'akov's eldest sons, Reuven, Shimon and Levi, and then commences a detailed description of the lineage of Mosheh and Aharon's family within the tribe of Levi. Within this section we are told that Mosheh and Aharon are the children of Amram and Yokheved.²

Why here, why now?

Furthermore, why does the Torah bookend the description of lineage with Mosheh's complaint about his impediment³ – why is Mosheh still hesitant, and what is the purpose of hearing Mosheh's complaint for a second time?

Finally, there is a slight textual difference between the Mosheh's two objections to Hashem's directive: Mosheh's initial objection is a kal vahomer, involving Benei Yisrael, plus a mention of his speech impediment:

הוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמְעֵנִי פְרַעֲהַ וְאֲנִי עֲרַל שִׁפְתַּיִם⁴

Mosheh's second objection makes no reference to Benei Yisrael, instead focusing only on the difficulty of the prospect of swaying Pharaoh given Mosheh's impediment:

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה לְפָנָי יְקֻמָּה הוּ אֲנִי עֲרַל שִׁפְתַּיִם וְאֵיךְ יִשְׁמַע אֵלַי פְּרַעֲהַ⁵

Based on Keli Yakar, I would like to suggest that this episode is a lesson in achieving the proper perspective and self-esteem in order to confidently embrace the missions we are given in life. Keli Yakar⁶ notes a similarity between the ways in which Mosheh and David HaMelekh are each chosen. The same way, he says, that Shemuel searched for the proper candidate for the throne among the children of Yishai⁷, so too Hashem searched through the children (and grandchildren and great-grandchildren) of Ya'akov Avinu to find Mosheh. In the words of Keli Yakar, it was only once Hashem found the "איש כלבבו הראוי" in Mosheh, that He knew His search for a leader was complete.

In this vein, while Mosheh came from a great lineage, it was he who was chosen from among all the other tribes and all the other relatives within his tribe. The Torah records the families of Reuven and Shimon to tell us

- 1 Shemot 2:1
- 2 Shemot 6:20
- 3 See 6:12 and 6:30
- 4 Shemot 6:12
- 5 Shemot 6:30
- 6 Shemot 6:14
- 7 I Shemuel 16:8-10

that being the oldest is no guarantee for a position of leadership. Each person has their own responsibility based on Hashem's plan for them. Despite Mosheh's speech impediment, he was chosen by Hashem from among the large pool of potential candidates Hashem had at His disposal.

We are given opportunities to be messengers of Hashem, in the sense that we can make a Kiddush Hashem every day of our lives. Situations present themselves that allow us to make His name great. We may think that there are others who are better suited for that particular situation, or who do not have the impediments that hamper us, and yet Hashem presents us with these opportunities so that we may seize them, despite our hesitations. We each receive these daily, small-scale revelations; our own miniature burning bushes of sorts. The Torah brings Mosheh's lineage at this point, after Mosheh protests, in order to say: "Yes it is true, Mosheh, you have this impediment and there are all these other great people who came before you, and yet

הוא אהרן ומִשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר אָמַר יְקֻנֶּק לָהֶם הוֹצִיאוּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־צְבֹאתָם.⁸

Despite all of the rich heritage, it is Mosheh (and Aharon) that Hashem has chosen to carry out this great task of leading Benei Yisrael out of slavery.

Now that Hashem has conveyed this message about Mosheh's lineage, why is Mosheh still complaining about his speech impediment a second time? Hashem's demonstration to Mosheh that he was chosen over all other potential candidates alleviated Mosheh's specific fear of whether **Benei Yisrael** would listen to him. Benei Yisrael would see that Hashem chose Mosheh over all the leaders and tribesmen, and that would resonate with Benei Yisrael and convince them that Mosheh was indeed Hashem's chosen leader. This demonstration, however, would carry no weight with Pharaoh, who would have no care or appreciation for Hashem's nuanced choice of leader. What difference would it make to Pharaoh that Mosheh was chosen over a descendant of Reuven, Shimon, Yehudah, etc.?

Mosheh's second objection centers around how he could possibly make an impression on Pharaoh, and this time Hashem responds by pointing out that He has given him his brother, Aharon, to be his "נביא"⁹ Perhaps Hashem is saying something like this: "once you realize, Mosheh, that I have chosen you from among all these other great people, do not therefore think that you are alone! Being chosen and singled out does not mean being isolated. Leading the Jewish people may be **your** unique task, but you did not come to this place out of thin air; draw from the lessons you have learned from your parents and grandparents, and - most specifically - lean on your brother who can help you every step of the way. With the help of these people, you will surely be able to succeed."

The overall message is that when we are presented with the tasks that Hashem sets out for each of us, we can draw hizzuk from those closest to us and from our ancestors, and use that to face our challenges and answer the calls of our miniature burning bushes.

8 Shemot 6:26

9 Shemot 7:1



BREAKING PHARAOH'S HEART

R. YAIR KAHN YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '77

While still in Midyan, Hashem addressed Mosheh and told him: “As you go to return to Mitsrayim, behold all the wonders that I have placed at your disposal, and you shall perform them before Pharaoh and I will harden his heart and he will not release the nation.”¹ The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, which is mentioned in the Torah numerous times, plays a major role in the discussion of free will. Due to the religious and philosophic importance of this discussion, volumes have already been written addressing the topic. Therefore, I prefer to relate to another issue unrelated to the philosophical debate which has not generated as much detailed discussion ‘umakom hinichu lanu lihitgader bo’.

Parashat Va’era documents Mosheh’s attempts to secure Pharaoh’s permission for Benei Yisrael to worship Hashem in the wilderness. It is noteworthy that throughout the initial wonders and plagues Pharaoh manages to harden his own heart without divine intervention. The first time that the Torah informs us that Hashem hardened Pharaoh’s heart, is following the plague of shehin.² This leads to the obvious question: what was so terrifying about shehin that would have broken Pharaoh down had Hashem not hardened his heart? Shehin was certainly uncomfortable, but was it life threatening? Would the attack of wild animals not be more frightening than shehin? Was dever, in which all the livestock of Egypt perished, not more damaging? Why then was the plague of shehin the breaking point?

At first glance, we are reminded of another case where shehin appears as the breaking point. The book of Iyov opens with the terrible calamities that occurred to Iyov’s family and property. Nevertheless, Iyov heroically accepted the inscrutable divine will: “Hashem gave and Hashem took away, blessed be Hashem’s name”³ Sefer Iyov then continues with Satan’s demand that Iyov suffer personally in a physical sense: “And Satan answered Hashem and said: ‘Skin for skin and all that a man has will he give for his life. But put forth your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, surely he will blaspheme You to Your face.’”⁴ Sefer Iyov then describes how Iyov is struck with shehin and that he eventually breaks down and curses his day.

The reference to shehin in Sefer Iyov makes one ponder whether there is a scriptural connection between the two stories. The plagues which preceded shehin, albeit terrible, did not affect Pharaoh’s own flesh. Therefore, Pharaoh was able to “heroically” defy the Almighty. But when Pharaoh’s own skin was covered with boils, his courage melted along with his flesh.

While this parallel to Sefer Iyov may be interesting, it is based on the assumption that Pharaoh himself was struck with boils. Although we might support this assumption based on a comparison to a Biblical paradigm found in Parashat Lekh Lekha,⁵ where the Torah is explicit that Pharaoh himself was struck with ‘negaim,’ which is associated with shehin,⁶ peshuto shel mikra weighs heavily against this. While the Torah mentions that the hartumim could not appear before Mosheh because they were struck by shehin, there is no similar reference made regarding Pharaoh himself.

1 Shemot 4:21


2 Shemot 9:12

3 Iyov 1:21

4 Iyov 2:4-5

5 Bereshit 12:17. Also see Ramban to Bereshit 12:10.

6 Yerushalmi Ketubot 7:9



Moreover, the simple reading of the Torah suggests that Pharaoh remained in Mosheh's presence, indicating that he was not personally struck by the plague. In fact, aside from a passing reference in the Zohar,⁷ I have not come across any sources that indicate that Pharaoh suffered personally from the plague of shehin. Therefore, we will explore a different avenue to explain the singularity of the plague of shehin.

Upon re-examining the section dealing with shehin, one should be struck by the reference to the hartumim. After their failure to produce lice, the hartumim acknowledge the divinity of Mosheh's mission and appear to lose their relevance. In fact, they are not mentioned in the subsequent plagues of arov and dever, nor in any of the plagues that follow shehin. Given this observation, what is the significance of the seemingly pointless reference to the absence of the hartumim during the plague of shehin? Why is it important for the Torah to note, that the hartumim were unable to appear before Mosheh?

Perhaps the Torah is offering us a hint as to why the plague of shehin was so devastating. The fact that the Torah notes the hartumim's inability to face Mosheh is a clear indication that up until this point, despite their theological concession to Mosheh, the hartumim nevertheless remained in the presence of Pharaoh. Shehin is the first plague in which Pharaoh is forced to face Mosheh and Aharon without the hartumim - alone.

For the first time, Pharaoh has no supporting cast to hold his hand and encourage him in the struggle against Mosheh and Aharon.⁸ Moreover, there are no representatives of Mitsrayim looking up to Pharaoh to see how he, the leader of the Egyptian nation will respond. Pharaoh, not as an Egyptian monarch, but as a lonely individual, finds himself in conflict with the will of the Almighty.

Pharaoh stands in isolation before Mosheh and Aharon; Pharaoh, distanced from his loyal subjects, stripped of his title, a lonely, frail, and finite creature before the representatives of the Infinite and Almighty Creator. He becomes aware of the terrifying reality of the insignificance of his finite existence. Facing the Infinite, Pharaoh melts into non-existence. If not for divine intervention, it would be impossible for Pharaoh to continue to defy Hashem.

Sometimes a social context can allow a person to deny basic existential realities. At times, it is necessary to dismiss all the hartumim that surround us. We must strip our own selves of titles and social status and return to a pure sense of self. Once we encounter the Infinite alone, we can try to develop honest and pure lives of religious and ethical principle.

7 Vol. 1 (Bereshit) Parashat Bereshit 26b- "kegavna d'Pharaoh umitsrai deparach behon shehin ava'buot"

8 See Rabenu Bahya 9:12



THE MESSAGE OF THE MONEY

DENA BLOCK MIGDAL OZ '04-'05

Toward the end of Parashat Bo, as the Torah is describing the Jewish people's climactic exodus from slavery in Egypt, a puzzling detail is included. The Torah explains that in preparation for leaving Egypt, the Jews followed Mosheh's instructions and requested or borrowed objects of material wealth from the Egyptians such as silver, gold, and articles of clothing. As the pasuk says,

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עָשׂוּ כְדִבַּר מֹשֶׁה וַיִּשְׁאַלוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם כֶּסֶף וְכֶלִי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת:¹

However, the pasuk here uses a really strange word in describing the acquisition of the Egyptian wealth. The word Va'yishalu is used, which can either mean they requested or they borrowed, depending on the chosen translation. No matter how you explain it, the pasuk is not describing the bitter and resentful slave finally having the upper hand against his hateful taskmaster.

Va'yishalu? They asked for it!? How can we understand the friendly language used to describe the interaction between groups of people who we would think of as mortal enemies. Why would they request anything? Why with the opportunity in front of them, did the Jews not just take what they wanted? In many ways, one would think they were entitled to do so!

The midrash, picking up on this strange terminology, explains that this was not the case, and that there was more to the relationship between the Egyptians and the Jews than one would think:

וכי מצרים ריעיהם של ישראל היו?! שהכתוב אומר איש מאת רעהו ואשה מאת רעותה?! אלא מלמד שאחרי המכות נהיו המצריים כרעיים וכאוהבים לישראל, כדי להשאיל להם כליהם, וישראל היה אומר לו למצרי ריעי ואהובי השאילני כלי זה, או מלבוש זה, כלי כסף וכלי זהב זה, ולא היה לו למצרי פנים למונעו ממנו, שנאמר ויתן ה' את חן העם בעיני מצרים.²


The midrash describes the relationship between the Jews and Egyptians as being not just cordial, but flourishing to the point where the riches of Egypt were happily handed over to the Jews upon their departure. Not only had the Jews and the Egyptians shed their mutual animosity, but after the plagues they became akin to the best of friends, כרעים וכאוהבים like dear loved ones requesting trivial goods from their friends. The midrash is not suggesting that the Jews and the Egyptians were actually friends after the plagues, but rather the Egyptians treated the Jews as if they were good friends, as evidenced by the pasuk³ that the מדרש quotes, "ויתן ה' את חן העם בעיני מצרים." Hashem made it so that the Jews found favor in the eyes of the Egyptians and were able to treat them like friends. When the Jews came to ask for anything - clothing or items of silver and gold - the Egyptians responded as they would to a good friend, by allowing them to borrow what they wanted.

If in fact this midrash is teaching us about the concept of friendship in its description of the relationship between the Jews and the Egyptians, a more subtle question arises. If this was a friendship to be recognized, why is it symbolized through monetary wealth? In the grand scheme of things, כסף וזהב ושמלת, seem insignificant. If the Torah wanted to teach us about a friendship, why not talk about the Erev Rav, the group of Egyptians who were so inspired by the Jewish people that they joined their ranks upon departure from Egypt? Why does the Torah use money, clothing, and

1 Shemot 12:35

2 Pesikta Zutrata Shemot 11

3 Shemot 11:3



jewels to highlight this friendship between the Jews and the Egyptians.

Strengthening the question, the mention of the monetary gain that took place during the Exodus from Egypt is mentioned not only in Parashat Bo, but is also emphasized as being an essential part of the process already during the time of the *ברית בין הבתרים*. During the *ברית בין הבתרים*, Avraham was told that his people will be enslaved, but that they will be redeemed and will leave with great material wealth: *ואחרי כן יצאו ברכוש גדול*.⁴ This theme, which appears again when God spoke to Mosheh at the burning bush,⁵ is seen here again during *מכת בכורות*. In fact, this motif even makes it into the Pesah Haggadah in several places. For example, one of the things that we thank God for in the song *dayenu* is the fact that God gave the Jewish people riches from the Egyptians, *ואלו נתן לנו את ממונם*.

If the message of this long awaited material wealth was really about friendship, as seen from the midrash, why did God choose to teach this important message in this particular way? What is it about material wealth that is so significant?

The message behind material wealth is that ultimately it is not about the money, but rather the money represents something more fundamental. Material possessions are mundane, but every person has certain material needs in life, regardless of how mundane they may seem. When a friend, parent, grandparent, or sibling provides these trivial necessities of life, the action is reflective of a much greater bond of deep care between the individuals. And in that vein, perhaps the message of the midrash is just that. When the Egyptians provided the Jewish people with everyday mundane possessions, they were acting as good friends would act; showing us that being close to someone is about providing for that person, even on a small scale. By providing these every day necessities, we show how much we care about others, because the little things in this context are more significant than the sum of their parts.

4 Bereshit 15:14
5 Shemot 3:21-22



“THE IRONY OF MAKAT HOSHEKH”

SHUA KATZ YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '11-'13

Throughout its description of Makat Hoshekh, the Torah emphasizes the uniqueness of the darkness that pervades Mitsrayim. Hashem creates not only darkness in Mitsrayim but also, “וימש חושך - darkness that may be felt.”¹ When Mosheh executes this command, he generates not just “hoshekh” but “חושך אפלה - thick darkness.”² In fact, that collection of Pesukim repeats the assertion that the darkness lasts for three days twice. What is unique about the darkness of Makat Hoshekh, and why do the Pesukim stress its physical attributes?

Furthermore, following the conclusion of Makat Hoshekh, the Torah describes Pharaoh's reaction and his conversation with Mosheh. On the surface, this reaction seems separate from the plague that precedes it. Pharaoh and Mosheh seem to argue about details of Benei Yisrael's departure - will only people leave, or will flock leave as well? Are we to understand that Makat Hoshekh and the ensuing dialogue between Pharaoh and Mosheh are disconnected, or does some relationship exist between Pharaoh's reaction and refusal and the darkness that comes before it?

In depicting the days of darkness, the Torah states, “לא ראו איש את אחיו ולא קמו איש מתחתיו שלשת ימים” - They did not see one another and did not rise from their place for three days.”³ Clearly, Makat Hoshekh is unparalleled not only in the duration of its darkness but also in the form of its darkness. Ramban⁴, based on this detail, argues that Makat Hoshekh was not a natural darkness, such as that which results from the concealment of the sun. Rather, Makat Hoshekh consisted of a thick cloud that descended from the sky and enveloped all of Mitsrayim. The supernatural quality of the darkness caused a unique state during which one person could not see another and could not move. In fact, the Pasuk utilizes an interesting formulation in describing the people's blindness - “לא ראו איש את אחיו” - They did not see their brothers.” By depicting the blindness in a familial context, the Torah further stresses the miraculous thickness and form of the darkness. Even brothers, the most familiar of people, could not see each other.

In fact, not only did the form of Makat Hoshekh inhibit sight, but the plague may have also affected the eye directly. Torah Temimah⁵ questions how darkness could have existed all day because such a change would divert from “סדרי בראשית - the orders of creation,” as Hashem promised Noah and his sons that “יום ולילה לא ישבותו” - Day and night will not cease.”⁶ In response, he suggests the possibility that the darkness did not pervade the atmosphere, but rather only covered the eyes of the Egyptians. The Egyptians, according to this approach, experienced a thick eye-blockage that prevented them from seeing. Thus, Makat Hoshekh was a direct attack on the Egyptian eye.

The Torah's emphasis on sight and on the eye is evident in the conclusion of the section as well. After Pharaoh refuses to release the Jewish nation, the Pesukim state,

“ויאמר-לו פרעה, לך מעלי: השמר לך, אל-תספך ראות פני -כי ביום ראתך פני תמות”

Pharaoh said to him (Mosheh), “Turn away from me. Take heed not to see my face again, for on the day you see my face, you will die.”⁷ Mosheh then responds, “ויאמר משה כן דברת לא אוסיף עוד ראות פניך” - Mosheh said, “You have spoken

1 Shemot 10:21
2 Ibid. 10:22
3 Ibid. 10:23
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid. 10:21
6 Bereshit 8:22
7 Shemot 10:28

well; I will not see your face again.”⁸

The Torah’s accentuation of the blindness of Makat Hoshekh highlights the irony of the plague and its aftermath. We would have expected that after experiencing three days of black-like darkness and losing his ability to see that Pharaoh would reflect on his loss of vision and appreciate his sense of sight. Indeed, Makat Hoshekh represents a microcosm of the problem that faces Pharaoh throughout the Makot: lack of vision. Before the series of plagues that befalls Mitsrayim, Pharaoh declared, “מי ה' אשר אשמע בקולו לשלח את ישראל לא ידעתי את ה' וגם את ישראל לא אשלח” - Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice and let Israel go; I know not Hashem and, moreover, will not let Israel go.”⁹ As the narrative proceeds, Hashem sends sign after sign, message after message, and plague after plague to demonstrate His existence and omnipotence, but Pharaoh refuses to recognize Hashem’s authority. In this sense, Makat Hoshekh is the perfect conclusion to the set of nine Makot, setting the stage for the final, ultimate Makah: Makat Bechorot. Hoshekh literally takes away Pharaoh’s sight, and when Pharaoh retrieves his vision, he still cannot see. Pharaoh cannot realize or admit that Hashem is the ultimate power to which he must subjugate himself.

This approach is stressed not only in the Torah’s emphasis on the sense of sight through the deliberate reiteration of the word “Re’ot,” but also in the dialogue between Pharaoh and Mosheh. After Makat Hoshekh concludes, Pharaoh immediately agrees to release Mosheh and his nation as long as their flock remains in Mitsrayim. Beit HaLevi notes that, on the surface, Pharaoh’s request is a fair one. After all, Hashem only commanded Mosheh to take the people; Mosheh added the nation’s flock based on his own logic. Therefore, when Pharaoh demands that the flock remain, seemingly, he does not defy Hashem; rather, he accepts Hashem’s decree, assured a new step in the right direction. However, the formulation of Pharaoh’s demand reveals just the opposite. Pharaoh first asks for sheep to remain and only afterwards yields to the release of Am Yisrael’s children, “רק צאנכם ובקרכם יוצג וגם טפכם ילך עמכם” - Only let your flocks and herds remain and your children will go with you.”¹⁰ Pharaoh does not submit himself to Hashem but rather makes a condition - if Am Yisrael leaves its sheep as collateral, he will release their children. The order of his requests indicates his true motivation. Had he truly intended to accept Hashem’s decree and to only refuse Mosheh’s personal request, Pharaoh would have asked for the sheep to remain only after permitting the children to leave. Beit HaLevi’s inference stresses the vision of which Pharaoh is lacking; Pharaoh refuses to recognize the power and authority of Hashem. Although Pharaoh regains his physical vision after Makat Hoshekh, he certainly does not regain his intellectual sight. Even supernatural darkness does not persuade Pharaoh of his lacking.

Based on this approach, Beit HaLevi explains a striking association between Makat Hoshekh and the Egyptians’ stubbornness. The Pasuk in Tehillim states, “שלה חשך ויהשך ולא מרו את דברו”¹¹ upon which the Midrash¹² interprets the subject of “ולא מרו” as the Egyptians. “ולא מרו” according to the Midrash, means “שלא קבלו במרות דברו של הקדוש ברוך הוא עליהם” - They did not accept the word of Hashem as authoritative.” Thus, according to this interpretation, the Pasuk associates the Egyptians’ obstinacy with Makat Hoshekh specifically. Even after the Egyptians experience the miraculous darkness during which they lose their sight, they fail to recognize the all-powerfulness and supremacy of Hashem that surrounds them.

As Ramban articulates, our responsibility and command is to remember what we witnessed in Mitsrayim: “יצוה אותנו שנעשה תמיד זכרון ואות לאשר ראו עינינו” - [Hashem] commands us to make always a memory and symbol of what we saw.”¹³ Unlike the Egyptians, we must use our vision to recognize and cherish Hashem’s involvement, authority, and power in our world.

8 Ibid 10:29

9 Ibid 5:2

10 Ibid. 10:24

11 Tehillim 105:28

12 Shemot Rabbah 14:1

13 Ramban to Shemot 13:16



PARASHAT BESHALAH: THE SPLITTING OF THE SEA

DR. YAEL ZIEGLER

Keriat Yam Suf is a seminal biblical event. It emerges quite frequently in later Tanakh references, both explicitly¹ and obliquely.² Biblical characters such as Rahav³ regard it as a source of personal faith, and biblical texts present it as a model for future national redemptions.⁴ Biblical leaders, namely, Yehoshua, Eliyahu and Elisha, imitate the event, illustrating its central role in the narrative of the Israelite nation.

Nevertheless, the incident is unanticipated and therefore quite surprising. In a story in which the majority of the events have been predicted in advance⁵ the absence of any prior knowledge of this episode is noteworthy and suggests an impromptu event. Moreover, Ibn Ezra⁶ points out that the splitting of the sea is an unnecessary miracle. Had the Israelite nation been permitted to continue on the direct route to the land of Canaan, they would not have arrived at the Reed Sea, they would probably not have been pursued by Pharaoh, and the miracle of the splitting of the sea would not have occurred.

What is the purpose of this unexpected and dispensable miracle? What does it add to the story of the Exodus?

While various explanations may be offered, the impromptu narrative suggests that something has been left undone, that the goals of the Exodus narrative have not yet been accomplished. Had all the objectives of the narrative been met, the Israelite nation would have continued directly on to Canaan in accordance with the original plan. What then are those unfulfilled goals and how does the episode at the Yam Suf amend these failures?

Perhaps, this event suggests that something is lacking in the punishment of the Egyptians. The drowning of the Egyptian army is the final, decisive blow to the Egyptian power and infrastructure which facilitated the cruel enslavement. It is also an effective final closure for a narrative that began by decreeing that all Israelite male infants should be drowned. Indeed, several well-known sources do appear to regard this event as a continuation of the plagues. In the Pesah Haggada, we recite a midrash that discusses the number of plagues which struck the Egyptians at the Reed Sea. Is this the point of the encounter? Perhaps God lures the Egyptians to the Reed Sea in order to smite them with a terminal blow, a conclusive act of revenge and justice. Nevertheless, the narrative never describes the drowning of the Egyptian army as a plague, and it is the smiting of the firstborn which was previously described as the decisive last plague.⁷ Moreover, there is nothing obvious lacking in the punishment of the Egyptians, which calls for a new set of plagues after the Exodus has been set in motion.

Another possibility is that this episode is addressed to the needs of the Israelite nation. The Israelite nation is strikingly sidelined in the story of the plagues. Despite the fact that the story revolves around their emancipation, the Israelites' involvement in the events is passive and peripheral.⁸ It can be suggested that the episode at the Yam Suf is designed to impart a message to the Israelite nation. This may be indicated by the manner in which the narrative in

1 e.g. Yeshayahu 63:12-14; Tehillim 78:13; 114:3, 5; 136:13-15; Nehemiah 9:11

2 e.g. Yeshayahu 51:10-11; Hoshea 13:15

3 Yehoshua 2:9-11

4 e.g. Yeshayahu 11:15-16; Zekhariah 10:11

5 see Bereshit 15:13-14; Shemot 3:7-8, 16-22; 6:6-8; 7:3-5,

6 Shemot 14:17

7 Shemot 11:1

8 e.g. Shemot 8:18; 9:26; 10:2, 23

Shemot 14 focuses on the Israelite nation: their duress, their cries to God, and the dramatic proclamation of their faith in God and Mosheh at the conclusion of the narrative.

R. Yoel Bin Nun⁹ suggests that God deliberately draws the Israelites into a final confrontation with their Egyptian slave masters so that they will make a decisive psychological break from Egypt. In order for the Israelites to escape from Egypt's patronage, they must abandon their perception of Egypt as an abiding address for their military troubles. Therefore, the Israelites witness this final, devastating military blow, in which the Egyptian army is drowned before their eyes. The key to this idea may well lie in a creative reading of Mosheh's declaration to the nation in Shemot 14:13: "As you see Egypt today, you will never again see them." In other words, the Israelites must alter their perspective so that they no longer perceive themselves as submissive dependents and the Egyptians as their potential patrons.

While this approach certainly has merit and may in fact be one objective of this event, this goal is surely not met. If this is, in fact, the primary objective of Keriat Yam Suf, then we would have to regard it as a failure. During their journey in the desert, the Israelites repeatedly yearn for Egypt,¹⁰ and the fear of the upcoming military conquest provokes an explicitly stated desire to return to Egypt.¹¹ In the long term, we find Shelomo turning to Egypt to purchase his military requirements,¹² and the prophets often rage against those who look to Egypt as their military patron.¹³ Even if this is the goal of the event at the sea, it is difficult to claim that the Israelites have made a clean break from Egypt after this episode.

Several midrashim offer another, perhaps complementary, reason for the events at the Yam Suf. Based on the verse in Shir Hashirim¹⁴ "My dove is in the crook of the rock... let me hear your voice, let me see your appearance, for your voice is sweet and your appearance beautiful," the midrash¹⁵ suggests that God brings about this final event in order to induce Israel to pray. After the Exodus, God desired to hear the voice of the Israelite nation, but the Israelite nation was unwilling to comply and refused to address God in prayer. Therefore, God contrived a threatening danger so that the Israelite nation would become fearful and turn to God. This plan is indeed effective. When the Israelites see Pharaoh in hot pursuit, they immediately cry out to God.¹⁶ In this way, they learn that God is the address for their distress.

The midrash's description of the Israelites' refusal to let God hear their voice is perplexing. Why would the children of Israel, who have so recently witnessed God's greatness and generosity towards them, be disinclined to pray to Him? This midrashic idea seems to suggest that the Israelite nation has not fully understood the enduring national significance of the events. In spite of their spectacular emancipation, which was surely orchestrated by God, the Israelites' response to the plagues had been muted and almost non-existent. The events of the Exodus have not been accompanied by any acknowledgment of God's involvement and therefore it seems unlikely that they intend to regard God as an address for their future needs. The episode at the Yam Suf is intended to facilitate communication with God in all moments of distress, and educate the nation toward constructing an ongoing relationship with God.

There is another possible understanding of the midrash which describes Israel's unwillingness to allow God to hear its voice. It is possible that this midrash is commenting on Israel's inadequate celebration of the Exodus in its immediate aftermath. The Exodus is not marked by an enthusiastic proclamation, or by a song of gratitude, awe, or joy.

9 Meggadim 3, pp. 21-32

10 e.g. Shemot 16:3; 17:3; Bemidbar 11:5

11 Bemidbar 14:3-4

12 Melakhim I 10:28-29

13 Yeshayahu 30:2-3; 31:1; Yermiyahu 2:18

14 2:14

15 Shir haShirim Rabbah ad loc.

16 Shemot 14:10



This deficient reaction recalls rabbinic criticism of Hizkiyahu,¹⁷ who could have been Messiah, but was deemed unworthy because he did not sing a song to God for the victory which God granted him against Sanhariv.¹⁸ Indeed, the Targum on the verse mentioned above¹⁹ suggests that the goal of Keriat Yam Suf is achieved when the Israelites allow God to hear their voice as they recite Shirat HaYam.

According to this approach, the narrative of Keriat Yam Suf is contrived because the nascent Israelite nation lacks a proper expression of gratitude to God. Cultivating a conscious appreciation for God's benevolence is the sine qua non for establishing and maintaining a relationship with Him. Thus, Shirat HaYam is the climax of the story of the Exodus, and perhaps its ultimate goal. Every event of national and personal experience must be viewed through the prism of this one, in which we recall our indebtedness to God and our gratitude for His patronage. Therefore, this song is incorporated into our daily prayer as a daily reminder of our obligation to articulate ongoing appreciation to God for every aspect of our national and individual existence.

17 Sanhedrin 94a
18 Melakhim II 18-19
19 Shir Hashirim 2:14

KERAT YAM SUF: THE END OF YETSIAT MITSRAYIM AND THE BEGINNING OF THE DESERT

YECHIEL SCHWAB YESHIVAT HAR ETZION '11-'13

The story of Keriat Yam Suf presented at the start of Parashat Beshalah is seemingly full of contradictions. The Pesukim describe that Benei Yisrael's path is chosen in order to avoid war¹ and only nine pesukim later they state it is chosen to cause war and to inspire Pharaoh to chase Benei Yisrael.² It is unclear whether Pharaoh's intentions are to re-enslave Benei Yisrael³, or to kill them.⁴ The miracle of Keriat Yam Suf is unclear as well. Exactly what role did the pillars of clouds play, and what role did the Yam Suf play? Keriat Yam Suf is a multi-layered story, and by examining these layers, we can resolve these contradictions. The story accomplishes two main goals simultaneously and these goals can be seen in the first two paragraphs of our Parasha. The first parashiya describes God's goal to eliminate Benei Yisrael's desire to return to Egypt, emphasizing the role of the bones of Yosef, and Elokim's intention to take Benei Yisrael to be His nation. The second parashiya describes God's desire to punish Egypt for the purpose of "Yediyat Hashem."

"Vehayiti Lachem Le'Elokim"

In Parashat Va'era God tells Mosheh His plans for Benei Yisrael. He wants to take them out of Egypt establish them as His nation, and He will be their Elokim.⁶ The word Elokim, usually translated as God, can also denote ruler, or leader, as it does in certain places of Shemot.⁷ One of the ways in which we relate to God, is not just as an all-powerful being, but as our provider, ruler and protector. This is why Elokim can sometimes be used to refer to people other than God; they are not all powerful, they are simply acting as leaders or providers. With this definition in mind, it would appear that God's goal to establish Himself as the Elokim of Benei Yisrael is not so simple, and this struggle can be seen throughout Sefer Shemot and Bemidbar. While enslaved in Egypt, Benei Yisrael's "Elokim" so to speak, was Pharaoh, and the country of Egypt. They provided for Benei Yisrael's food, water and protection. This explains many of Benei Yisrael's complaints later in Sefer Shemot. Even though Egypt had enslaved and tortured them, they still missed the days of Egypt when they had plenty of food,⁸ because Egypt provided for them. Egypt, for so many years, was their "Elokim" who consistently provided for Benei Yisrael's physical needs. Even after leaving Egypt, Benei Yisrael had a hard time adjusting to the fact that it was God, not Egypt, who provided for them.

This is what God is referring to in the first pasuk: "Lest the nation repent when they see war and return to Egypt."⁹ When Benei Yisrael first encounter war, who will they remember as their protector, the one who defends them in war? Obviously Egypt, who has been defending them from enemies for so long. Hashem needs to change this mindset. He takes them on a roundabout path, not to avoid war, but specifically to encounter war. Except this will be a war with Egypt, not with the Pelishtim. This sheds light on the seemingly misplaced pasuk detailing Mosheh's carrying of Yosef's bones. The pasuk sends us further into the past, as well as towards the future. The connection to Yosef reminds us that it was God who had sent Benei Yisrael down to Egypt, and that He was the one who truly provided for them the entire

1 Shemot 13:17

2 Shemot 14:4

3 Shemot 14:5

4 Shemot 14:11


5 We will be distinguishing between the use of Elokim and Hashem, as representative of the two main ideas and themes of the story. God will be used as a term referring to neither.

6 Shemot 6:7

7 Shemot 4:16, Rashi ibid, 7:1

8 Shemot 16:3

9 JPS Translation for Shemot 13:17



time. The idea of “pakod yifkod” reminds us of God’s ultimate goal to take Benei Yisrael to the land of Israel.¹⁰ In the land of Israel, God will provide for Benei Yisrael, but Benei Yisrael must remember and recognize that it is God who is providing for them. Our Parasha represents the start of a long journey through the desert, where God must re-educate Benei Yisrael that it is He who provides for them, not Egypt, or anyone or anything else.

This goal is accomplished in two ways during the story of Keriat Yam Suf: God establishes Himself as Benei Yisrael’s protector and He removes Egypt from this role. God’s role as protector is first seen from the pillars. They serve as a constant reminder that God is protecting and watching over Benei Yisrael. The rest of the story has many different components, but there is one pasuk which very clearly delineates which elements are related to the theme of God as protector. “Hashem saved on that day, Yisrael from Egypt, and Yisrael saw Egypt dead on the shore.”¹¹ The pasuk outlines two main themes: Yisrael being saved and Yisrael seeing Egypt dead. But it does not mention the punishment of Egypt itself, but simply that Benei Yisrael saw that Egypt had fallen. This aligns perfectly with the two themes we mentioned. There is on the one hand God’s role as the protector of Benei Yisrael, established by the pillars, which provided a physical protection, and demonstrated God’s role in fighting for Benei Yisrael.¹² On the other hand, we have the sight of Egypt dead on the shore, removing from Benei Yisrael’s eyes the concept of Egypt as their protectors. Egypt is now dead as Benei Yisrael’s old guardians have been soundly defeated by their new Guardian.

This process of establishing God as Elokim for Benei Yisrael continues throughout our parasha, the rest of Shemot, and Bemidbar. We constantly must remember that God is our Elokim, and we only rely on Him.¹³ (But, the results can be seen at least partially later in our parasha; the last aliyah of Beshalah describes the famous war with Amalek. God specifically chose this route of encountering Egypt and defeating them so Benei Yisrael would not attempt to return to Egypt at the sign of war. And indeed, during the story of Amalek, there is no attempt to return to Egypt. Benei Yisrael have begun to establish God as their guardian and provider; their Elokim.

“Veyed’atem Ki Ani Hashem”

The second element of Keriat Yam Suf is Yediyat Hashem from the side of Mitsrayim. When discussing the establishment of God as Elokim for Benei Yisrael, we discussed Pharaoh the ruler, the guardian of the people. Our parasha gives hints that this is his character. He embarks on his journey simply to return Benei Yisrael to his country. They were residents of his country, who ran away against his orders, and he was simply chasing them to retrieve them. But we also have indications that Pharaoh was trying to kill Benei Yisrael. What were Pharaoh’s intentions?

When discussing evil, or a person who wrongs another, there are two main modes. There is the mode of purposeful pain, and there is the mode of apathy, or complete lack of care towards the pain of the other. Pharaoh was not pursuing purposeful pain; his ultimate goal was not to murder Benei Yisrael. His goal was to enslave them. But he did not at all care if in order to maintain control over Benei Yisrael he caused them immense pain. In the beginning of Shemot, we are told of Pharaoh’s plans to enslave Benei Yisrael and give them work - not because he wanted to cause them pain, but because he was worried of revolt. He extends this practice to the murder of the male children for this same goal. Although Pharaoh claims to simply be trying to prevent a revolt, the result is genocidal, and the bitter enslavement of a nation. Is Pharaoh any morally better because his ultimate goal was not to kill Benei Yisrael? The debate seems unfitting; in no sense does the phrase “morally better” apply to Pharaoh. He knowingly and actively enslaved and massacred a nation. His ultimate goals are irrelevant.

10 Shemot 3:17-18

11 JPS Translation for Shemot 14:30

12 See Shemot 14:25, which relates the confusion Hashem caused in the camp of the Egyptians through the pillars, which led them to say that Hashem was fighting for Benei Yisrael.

13 This is an idea which extends into Nakh, and is a constant personal struggle with which each of must deal

Hashem's goal was "Da'at Hashem." Hashem is often used to refer to God's justice and morality.¹⁴ Here too, God's goal is to demonstrate his morality and justice. Pharaoh had attempted to murder and bitterly enslave a nation. The purpose of the plagues, and the reason why Pharaoh and his entire army deserved to drown in the sea, was to show the attribute of Hashem, of justice and morality. To show that God believes in justice, and those who do not follow His morality will be punished accordingly. If you attempt to drown an entire nation in the sea, God will drown you in the sea.

The story of Keriat Yam Suf is complicated, and comprised of many different parts. These different parts correspond to different goals, and teach us different lessons. God redirects Benei Yisrael in order to establish Himself as their Elokim, and remove Egypt from their minds. Simultaneously, God strengthens Pharaoh's heart, and leads Pharaoh to chase Benei Yisrael so that Hashem can exact justice upon Pharaoh for the suffering he caused Benei Yisrael. Egypt is presented as the rulers and guardians of Benei Yisrael, and it is this Egypt that Benei Yisrael must see dead. But it is the murderous enslaving Egypt whom God must destroy in the sea. The pillars and the confusion they cause in the Egyptian camp are meant to demonstrate God's role as the Elokim and protector of Benei Yisrael. The last two pesukim perfectly sum up these themes. Shemot 14:30 discusses God's role as our Elokim, He who constantly provides and guards for us at every moment. Shemot 14:31 discusses the punishments he delivered upon Egypt, and the "Yirat Hashem" and "Emunat Hashem" of Benei Yisrael who are instilled with the awe and belief in God's morality and justice.

14 See Bereshit 18:18, among others



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