

Parsha Shemos

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1. The Continuation of Creation

Rabbi Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the Netziv), who was the Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin from 1852 to 1892, authored the work *Haamik D'var*, which is a commentary on the Chumash. The *Haamik D'var* provides an introduction to each of the five books of the Chumash.

In his introduction to Shemos, the Netziv explains how the Ramban identifies the second book of the Torah as *Sefer Ha'Geulah* (the Book of Redemption). Clearly the Ramban identifies the book of Shemos as the Book of Geulah based on its content. However, the Netziv comments that B'HAG (Bal Halachos Gedalos – one of the earlier codifiers of Jewish law) refers to the first book of the Torah as *Sefer Bereishis* (the Book of Creation) and the second book as *Sefer Sheini* (the Second Book). Books three through five are identified based on content. The Netziv asks if the B'HAG understood that the way to identify the books of the Torah is based on the content of each book then why does he not identify the second book in this manner? If the B'HAG wished to simply number the five books of the Chumash as he did with the second, then why assign names to the others based on content?

The Netziv answers that if the B'HAG identified the first two books of the Chumash based on content as the Ramban does, then one might regard them as two independent books of the Torah. However, by identifying the second book as *Sefer Sheini* it seems evident that the second book is the continuation and conclusion of the first book. In order to understand this point, we need to comprehend – what is the purpose of all of creation?

The answer is that the only purpose of creation (as told in the first book) is that the events of the Patriarchs needed to unfold as they did; and it was necessary for Yaakov to go with his family to Egypt to ultimately receive the Torah at Sinai (as told in the second book).

The Gemara in *Avoda Zarah* quotes a verse which states that the world was “uneasy” and “unsteady” until it became “tranquil” at Sinai. Rash Lakish explains, as Rashi quotes in *Sefer Bereishis*, that until the receiving of the Torah at Sinai the existence of the world was in question and was not on steady ground. If the Jews accepted the Torah at Sinai then the world would continue; however, if they rejected the torah then all of creation would have ceased to exist. Therefore until the Jews accepted the Torah at Sinai the world did not have a status of permanency. The world only became “tranquil” when the Jews accepted the Torah at Sinai. This acceptance fulfilled the purpose of creation (started in the first book) and achieved a completion (in the second book.) This is why B”HAG refers to the second book of the Torah as *Sefer Sheini* and not by its content.

The Torah tells us that every living creature was created with its counterpart (male and female) except for man who was created alone. It was only afterwards that Hashem said that it was not good for man to be alone and created Chava to be Adam’s counterpart. Why was Adam created as a single individual without his mate? The Mishna explains that Hashem wanted Adam to recognize and understand that the world and the entire universe were created for him.

Understanding that existence and all of its magnificence was created solely for Adam, we can begin to appreciate our own individual relevance to the entirety of creation. Each of us has a great and unlimited potential as well as the incumbent responsibility because Hashem created the world for our sake and for the fulfillment of the Torah. Without the Torah, man would be no

different from any other creature. As the Netziv explains, *Sefer Bereishis* was the beginning of creation when the world and man came into existence and *Sefer Sheini* was the acceptance of the Torah by the Klal Yisroel, thus completing the purpose of creation.

2. An Appreciation for what is Wrong is the Prerequisite for Doing What is Right

In this week's Parsha the Torah tells us, "A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, 'Behold the people, the Children of Yisroel are more numerous and stronger than we. Come let us act wisely...'" Until Yosef and his entire generation passed away, the Jews living in Egypt were regarded as members of the upper echelon of Egyptian society. However, after Yosef's generation passed away, as it is stated in the text, the situation for the Jews in Egypt deteriorated. Pharaoh legislated new edicts and instituted taskmasters in order to enslave the Jews. The Torah makes a point to stress that the new Pharaoh behaved in this manner because he "did not know Yosef."

If Pharaoh had known Yosef and understood all that he had done for the good of the Egyptian civilization, he would have not have taken any negative actions against the Jews. It is only because Pharaoh did not know Yosef that he decreed bondage for the Jewish people.

Rashi cites the Gemara in *Sota* that presents two opinions regarding the meanings of "a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef." One interpretation given by the Gemara is that there was a new Pharaoh ruling Egypt and this man literally did not know Yosef. The second understanding is that the Pharaoh was actually that same king who knew Yosef; however, he decided to establish new edicts against the Jews thus acting as if he did not know Yosef. Meaning Pharaoh needed to forget Yosef in order to legislate decrees against the Jews.

The Torah is teaching us a profound concept that it is impossible to behave the wrong way towards a person if one feels a sense of gratitude and appreciation to him. If Pharaoh would have consciously appreciated the reality that Egypt only continued to exist because of all that Yosef had done, he could not have acted cruelly to his family.

We all believe in Hashem, yet very often we behave in ways that are contrary to His will. It is true that we do not debate the existence of G-d; however, are we conscious of His presence? And even if we were conscious of Hashem's presence, are we aware of what His will is for us? If we were truly conscious of Hashem and understood our responsibilities and obligations towards Him, we would never behave wrongly. It is only if we do not have this level of clarity that we can justify behaving against His will.

The first Beis Ha'Mikdash was destroyed because the Jews were involved with idol worship, adultery and murder. The introduction to the Midrash on Eicha states that Hashem said, "I wish that the Jews had abandoned Me but kept My Torah. Because the enlightenment of Torah would have ultimately brought them back."

If, as Hashem said, the Jews would have studied the Torah diligently (even if this would have been within a cultural context), the clarity gained would have eventually influenced them to perform the will of Hashem. From this we can understand that a person can continuously behave the wrong way only because he does not appreciate what he is doing.

Clarity is the ability to appreciate and understand wrong. As Rabbenu Yona states in *Shaar Teshuvah*, the first step in the act of repentance is recognizing and understanding the wrong that one has done. Before one can perform good deeds, one needs to appreciate and understand wrong ones. The deeper one can understand the gravity of wrongdoing, the greater the ability to perform good deeds.

This is what the Torah is teaching us with “a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.” First, Pharaoh had to negate his understanding and appreciation of what Yosef had done for Egypt (“he did not know Yosef”) and then he was able to act against the Jews.

G-d willing, as we engage ourselves in Torah study we will be able to gain the clarity to appreciate the consequences of our actions and we will thus be propelled to perform the will of Hashem.

3. The Chesed of Hashem

Rashi cites Chazal that last week’s Parsha Vayichi is written as a “sealed Parsha.” This is because after the death of Yaakov the hearts and the eyes of the Jews became sealed as a result of their bondage. However, the Torah tells us in this week’s parsha that the bondage only began after the passing of Yosef and his entire generation rather than after the passing of Yaakov. How do we understand this?

The Ohr Ha’ Chaim Ha’Kadosh explains that the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt came about in stages before it resulted in physical bondage. As long as Yaakov was alive the Jews were regarded to be at the top of the social order; in fact they were considered greater than Egyptians were. However after Yaakov passed away they were seen at the same level as the upper echelon of Egypt. Then, after Yosef passed away, the Jews were reduced in the eyes of the Egyptians even further. Ultimately, by the time Yosef’s generation passed away, they were enslaved and considered outcasts.

We read in Parsha Vayichi that when Yosef and his brothers took Yaakov to be buried in Canaan the ministers and officers of Egypt walked at the head of the procession. Conversely, on the return from Canaan to Egypt, Yosef and his brothers were at the head of the line while the Egyptian ministers were in the back. Why did the order change?

Rashi cites the Midrash that Yaakov’s coffin was taken to Canaan where he was eulogized. Yosef removed his crown (the crown of the Viceroy of Egypt) and placed it on top of his father’s coffin. At that time all the nations of Canaan were about to attack the funeral procession of Yaakov. However when they saw the crown of the Egyptian Viceroy on top of the coffin, the kings of Canaan and the princes of Yishmael removed their crowns and placed them on top of Yaakov’s coffin. Having witnessed this incredible display of respect and reverence towards Yaakov, the Egyptian ministers gave honor to Yosef’s family by walking behind them in the procession returning to Egypt.

Evidently, from the order of the procession on the way to Canaan, it is clear that at first Yosef’s family was not recognized or valued appropriately - despite being the brothers of the Viceroy of Egypt. If this is so, then why did Yosef’s demonstration of reverence for his father change the ministers’ understanding of Yosef’s family?

The Rambam states in *Hilchos Talmid Torah* that there are three crowns given to the Jewish people: the Crown of Torah, the Crown of *Kahuna* (priesthood), and the Crown of *Malchus* (kingship). However, the greatest of the three is the Crown of Torah. When Yosef removed his crown and placed it on his father’s coffin, he was declaring to all present that the Crown of *Malchus* is subordinate to the Crown of Torah, which was personified by Yaakov. When the kings and princes witnessed this for the first time they realized that not only was Yaakov a special, holy person, but that he was greater than Yosef.

If the Egyptians had not witnessed this display of reverence, they would not have understood or appreciated the dimension of Yosef’s family. As a result, the physical bondage of the Jews would have started sooner. The Egyptians’ new appreciation of Yosef’s generation delayed enslavement until after their passing. From this we see the great *chesed* (kindness) of Hashem in allowing the events to unfold as they did.

4. *The Impact of our Deeds*

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh appointed Yocheved (referred to as Shifrah) and Miriam (referred to as Puah) to be the head midwives supervising the delivery of all Jewish children. The Torah says, **“The King of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah - and he said, ‘in your assisting the Hebrew women at childbirth and you see on the birthstool, if it is a son you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the King of Egypt spoke to them, and they kept the boys alive. The King of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, ‘Why have you done this thing, that you have kept the boys alive!’ The midwives said to Pharaoh, ‘because the Hebrew women are unlike the Egyptian women...”**

During the course of the interchange between Pharaoh and the midwives, he (the Pharaoh) is referred to as *“King of Egypt”* three times; however, after Yocheved and Miriam disobeyed his order to kill the Jewish male children they refer to him as *“Pharaoh.”* What is the significance of this?

The King of Egypt was the most powerful monarch in the world. He was the leader of the most advanced and dominant civilization in the world. When he appointed Yocheved and Miriam to be the head midwives and commanded them to kill the Jewish male children he did so with the authority and power of the *“King of Egypt”*. When the midwives disobeyed him the Torah tells us that they did so despite his being the mighty *“king of Egypt”*. Upon discovering that his order was not carried out the *“King of Egypt”* (the awesome monarch) summoned the midwives to find out why he was disobeyed.

After the Torah tells us that Yocheved and Miriam disobeyed the order because they feared Hashem, they explained to *“Pharaoh”* why they did not kill the male children. Meaning that because they feared Hashem they perceived the King of Egypt only as *“Pharaoh”* (the person) and not the most powerful monarch in the world. The Torah is teaching us that the midwives viewed the king of Egypt as subordinate to Hashem.

Immediately following this, the Torah tells us, **“G-d did good to the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made houses for them.”** Rashi explains that the *“houses”* which are referred to in the pasuk are the houses of the *Kehunah* (priesthood) and *Leviyah* (tribe of Levi), which emanated from Yocheved and the house of Malchus (kingship), which emanated from Miriam. However, the pasuk interjects, in the middle of Hashem’s doing good for the midwives, that the Jewish people increased and became strong. What does the proliferation of the Jewish nation have to do with Hashem’s reward to Yocheved and Miriam?

The Gemara tells us in *Sukkah* that before a person gives charity he must first ascertain the worthiness of the recipient of the charity. However if the person is a tzaddik then he does not need to verify the worthiness of the recipient because Hashem performs a special kindness with the tzaddik and only sends him the appropriate needy people.

Hashem does not grant this kindness to the average person and therefore he must be careful to whom he gives charity. The Gemara says that the reason for Hashem’s special kindness to tzaddikim is that He wants to maximize the merit and effectiveness of the tzaddik’s actions. Therefore the opportunities, which are presented to him, are much greater than the average person.

The Torah tells us that after the midwives allowed the Jewish males to live, Hashem did *“good”* for them by increasing their number and making them strong. Meaning as a result of their sacrifice and their fear of G-d, Hashem not only caused the children that they saved to live but also caused the Jews to increase, thereby increasing the effectiveness and merit of Yocheved’s and Miriam’s actions. Rather than their actions resulting only in saving of a few lives, Hashem caused the Jews to increase in great number thus causing Yocheved and Miriam’s deeds to have limitless value.

Hashem did “good” for the midwives by imbuing their actions with even greater value, which is the reward that Hashem gives to tzaddikim. This is why the proliferation of the Jews is directly related to the midwives’ fear of Hashem. If Yocheved and Miriam were average people, then the results of their actions would have also been average. From this we learn that the degree of success of our actions is a reflection of us as individuals. The more devout one is (to Hashem), the greater the impact of one’s deeds.

5. Measure for Measure - Miriam’s Reward

The Torah tells us that in order to hide Moshe from the Egyptians, who had decreed that all Jewish male newborn children should be killed, his mother placed him in a basket between the reeds at the bank of the river. The Torah states, **”His sister (Miriam) stood at a distance to know what would be done with him (Moshe).”** The question is why did Miriam wait to see what would happen to Moshe? In addition, Chazal tell us that because Miriam waited, although it was just for a moment, Miriam merited great reward. How do we understand this?

The Midrash tells us that after the splitting of the Red Sea and the drowning of the Egyptians, **“Miriam the sister of Aaron led the women in song.”** Since Miriam was the sister of both Aaron and Moshe why was Miriam only identified as “the sister of Aaron?” The Gemara answers that Miriam had prophesized that her parents would bear the Redeemer of Israel. As the Chazal tell us, after Amram (Miriam’s father) had separated from his wife, Miriam told her father that the Egyptians had only decreed to kill the male children; by separating from his wife (and not propagating) his action was more severe than the Egyptians’ because he would also be killing the female children. As a result of Miriam’s criticism, Amram then remarried his wife and fathered Moshe,

The Chazal tell us that when Moshe was born, the house was illuminated and it was evident to his parents that he was destined to be The Redeemer. When it was necessary to hide Moshe from the Egyptians by putting him into the river, Amram was concerned about Moshe’s survival and was skeptical if Miriam’s prophecy would come true. Would Moshe survive and become the Redeemer of Yisroel? Or will Moshe drown or be killed by the Egyptians? Miriam therefore stood at a distance to see what the outcome would be.

The Torah tells us in Parsha *Beha’aloscha*, that Miriam became a leper because she spoke critically (*Loshon Hara*) of her brother Moshe. As a result of her condition, she had to be sent out of the camp of Israel for seven days until she recovered. The Midrash tells us that in the merit of her waiting to see what would happen to Moshe, the entire Klal Yisroel (millions of people), the Heavenly Clouds of protection, as well as the Shechina (the Divine Presence) and the Holy Ark waited for Miriam. The Midrash explains this is an example of “measure for measure” – since she waited to see what would happen to her brother Moshe, the camp did not travel until she recovered from her leprosy.

Firstly, what was so special about Miriam’s waiting to see what would happen to Moshe that she should merit this level of reward? One would think that any sister would wait to see what would happen to their baby brother. Secondly, how could it be considered a reward that millions of people, the Shechina, etc. waited for Miriam to recover from an affliction that came about as a result of her speaking *Loshon Hara* about Moshe? One would think that her transgression would have best been left private and her affliction kept hidden from the community. This seems to be a disgrace rather than a reward. How do we understand this?

Miriam’s concern for her brother Moshe was not merely the sisterly concern for a sibling’s survival. After his mother put Moshe into the reeds, Amram tapped her on the head and asked her about the validity of her prophecy given that Moshe’s survival was uncertain. When Miriam stood in anticipation to see what was going to happen, her concern was focused on if Moshe was going to survive and be the Redeemer of Israel (as per her prophecy) or was he going to perish – thus eliminating the possibility for a redemption. Consequently, there would be no Sinai event; no giving of the Torah, and thus the purpose of existence would never have come to fruition. From

this we are able to understand why Miriam received such great honor by having the entire Klal Yisroel wait for her recovery.

The second question still remains – how was this a reward or and honor for Miriam? All of Miriam's actions were for the sake of Hashem. Her intent was continuously to do the will of G-d. When she shared her criticism of Moshe with her brother Aaron (that Moshe had behaved incorrectly), Hashem reacted to her criticism. Hashem told her that her comments were baseless because Moshe, as a person, and as a prophet, was greater than her and Aaron. Although Miriam's intent was pure and well meaning, her evaluation of Moshe was wrong and Hashem made an example of her for all generations to fully understand the seriousness of speaking *Loshon Hara* (evil speech).

Miriam's actions and its consequences have been immortalized for all history to enable generations of Jews to understand that even if one is a tzaddik and has the proper intent, Hashem will deal with them accordingly. This brought great merit to Miriam because though her punishment, all those who were present as well as all future generations would be taught the lesson of not speaking *Loshon Hara*.

6. The Ultimate Truth

The Torah tells us that when Moshe became an adult, he went to see the suffering of his brothers (the Jewish people) and he came across an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moshe first looked around then killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The reason why Moshe killed the Egyptian was because he had raped the wife of the Jew who he was beating.

We read earlier in the Torah that Yaakov rebuked Shimon and Levy after they destroyed the city of Shechem in order to avenge the raping of Dinah. Yaakov, however, did not rebuke them for committing an act of murder but rather he chastised them for taking action at a time that would have called attention to Yaakov's family (who were only small in number) and, G-d forbid jeopardized the future of the Jewish people. According to Halacha (Jewish Law), Shimon and Levy's destruction of Shechem was permitted; however, their timing was not appropriate.

Moshe understood that he was a special person. As the Midrash tells us- the house became illuminated at the time of his birth and he was born able to speak, walk and think at an adult level. He knew that he was going to be the Redeemer of Yisroel. The question is – how could Moshe kill the Egyptian knowing that he may be discovered and have to flee Egypt? By not being in Egypt with the Jewish people, wouldn't Moshe have also jeopardized their future?

We find that Moshe did in fact need to flee to Midian because of a Jewish informant. When Moshe arrived in Midian, he immediately involved himself in a conflict between shepherds who were driving away some shepherdesses from a water hole. He reacted in this manner because he saw injustice being committed.

Moshe was a fugitive from the most powerful nation in the world (the Egyptians). One would think that Moshe would try to remain hidden and act carefully so as not to expose himself. Yet, we see that Moshe immediately involved himself in the fray. How could Moshe justify doing this? Did he not know the potentially damaging consequences to himself as well as the Jewish people? Moshe saw injustice and needed to correct the situation immediately. The consequences to Moshe were irrelevant. How do we understand this?

We find that the characteristic of Yaakov is *Emes* (Truth). Yaakov always conducted himself in a manner that was consistent with being truthful. Yaakov spoke truthfully even in the situation where he disguised himself as Esav in order to receive the blessings from his father Yitzchak. He did not alter his manner of speaking in a refined manner and attributed his success to Hashem. These were not Esav's characteristics therefore he ran the risk of being discovered. Yet, Yaakov would not compromise his standard of truth, which was his belief. (See: **previous commentaries on Parshas Toldos "Guarding our Mouths"**)

The Torah refers to Yaakov as “the perfect person who dwells in the tent” and the Gemara tells us that “tent” is referring to the tent of Torah. The Gemara in Berachos tells us that the “signet of G-d” is Truth and therefore the only way to have an intimate relationship with Hashem is to be the bearer of Truth. Torah is Truth and Yaakov would not compromise it in any way.

Shlomo Ha'Melech tells us in *Mishlei (Proverbs)*, “Acquire truth and do not sell it.” Torah is the absolute Truth and Moshe merited to receive the Torah because he did not deviate from the truth. If he saw injustice he could not restrain himself from immediately seeking to correct the situation without any regard of its consequences. If Moshe had acted differently, it would have been considered a breach of the truth.

Moshe acted in accordance with the truth, which was his yardstick. Because of this he merited to have an intimate relationship with Hashem and to receive the Torah at Sinai, which is the ultimate Truth.