



Parshat HaShavuah

שמות

SHMOT

י"ט טבת תשע"ה

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

5:27

S"Z Kriat Shema

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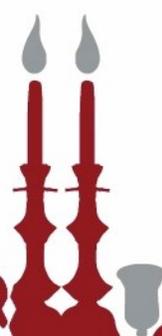
Sunset

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Motzei

Shabbat

6:23



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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GOT STRAW? RABBI CHAIM LANNER

Remember when Moshe first went to Pharaoh to ask that he let the Jews go free? Pharaoh, as you may recall, is infuriated by the request, and he wants to extinguish any thoughts the Jews have of going free. He decides to up the ante and make the Jews work even harder.

But here's what's odd. Instead of simply demanding that the Jews double or triple their output volume, Pharaoh decrees that the Jews will no longer be given straw to make bricks, and yet the supply of bricks produced must not diminish by even one. That seems so inefficient! Pharaoh and his booming economy would gain so much more by continuing to give the Jews the straw they need and increasing the number of bricks they need to produce.

We all know that Hashem was orchestrating every step along the way of this Egyptian exile as per his prophetic description to Avraham years back. From the sale of Yosef down to Egypt to the ten plagues that got us out, it was all the fancy footwork of God. So our query is equally directed towards Hashem. Why is the extra burden of the straw a necessary step for the Jews to endure while they are in Egypt? Is *regular* slavery not enough that God needs to have Pharaoh kick it into high gear?

So, here's the difference between having straw and not. When the task is simply to wake up each morning, show up to work, and build Pharaoh his pyramids and cities, this is basically your typical 9 to 5 job. You punch in, you do your thing, you punch out, and then you're on your own until the next morning. But the minute the straw is taken away from us, the minute that we become responsible for the collection of the raw material needed to perform our daily routine, our work day expands to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

You are constantly on the lookout for straw. There is no such thing as being off the clock or on vacation. Straw is always on your mind, no matter where you are, no matter what you are doing. You always have an eye and ear open to discover where that next piece of straw will be found.

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PERFECT IMPERFECTION

LANA ROSENTHAL ('17)

MONTHLY WRITER

This week's parsha, Parshat Shmot, describes the birth and youth of Moshe, who dominates what is left of the five books of the Torah. Moshe Rabbeinu is known as the greatest leader and individual in Jewish history and models the way Jews should strive to live. One of the most famous characteristics of Moshe is highlighted in the phrase, "לא איש דברים אֲנִי...כִּי כִבֹּד-פֶּה וּכְבֹד לְשׁוֹן אֲנִי" - "I am not a man of words...for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech" (Shmot 4:10). Moshe uses this phrase as an excuse for not being able to talk to Pharaoh.

Rav Shmuel Goldin proposes a question: If Moshe was using this speech impediment as an excuse, why did Hashem not just cure the lisp and eliminate Moshe's only defense? After all, He does respond, "מִי שֶׁם פֶּה לְאָדָם...הֲאֵא אֲנִי ה" - "Who makes a mouth for a man?... Is it not I, Hashem?" (4:11).

The obvious solution would be for Hashem, the all-powerful Creator who created the impediment, to simply remove it. Then the problem would be quite easily solved. However, Hashem instead tells Moshe that his brother, Aharon, will be his mouth; Aharon will speak for him. Rav Goldin answers that "perfection is not a prerequisite for accomplishment." Moshe has a speech impediment to teach us that despite his "imperfection," he is able to be the closest person to Hashem.

This is a lesson that repeats itself throughout the Torah; every role model who is presented to us has some flaw that he or she is able to overcome. A person whose role models are seemingly perfect cannot help but feel discouraged, since no person can ever attain perfection and therefore he or she would be trying to reach an impossible goal. However, when one recognizes that his or her role model has flaws but is still able to serve Hashem and attain a high level of holiness, he or she will feel empowered to do the same. We must all recognize that despite our flaws, we are able to achieve great things, including a close relationship with Hashem.

WHO AM I?

Yael Attias ('16)

MONTHLY WRITER

This week's parsha, Parshat Shmot, provides us with insight into Moshe's true identity and persona. When Moshe, at the burning bush, asks God, "Who am I?" (3:11), he is really asking two things. The first question is, "Who am I to be worthy of such a great mission?" Secondly, Moshe asks, "How can I possibly be successful in the daunting task of confronting Pharaoh?"

God answers the second part of this question by explaining to Moshe that he will be successful because he will not be alone—God is on his side. However, Hashem never answers Moshe's first question. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks suggests that God did not answer the first question because, in a way, Moshe answered it himself.

Throughout Tanach, the people who turn out to be the most worthy of leadership are those who deny being worthy at all. The heroes in our history did not think they were born to rule. In fact, they were people who doubted their own abilities and became leaders against their will. Some examples are: Yishayahu the Navi, when charged with his mission; Yirmiyahu the Navi who says that he can't speak because he is a child; and Dovid HaMelech, Israel's greatest king, who echoed Moshe's words, "Who am I?"

God did not need to answer Moshe's question of "Who am I to be worthy of such a great mission?" because Moshe's question is in fact the reason he is worthy. It seems as if a feeling of smallness is a sign of greatness. Furthermore, within Moshe's question of "Who am I?", there is also a question about identity. Moshe is not only questioning God, he is questioning himself. Moshe was brought up in the palace as an Egyptian prince. He looks like an Egyptian, dresses like an Egyptian, and speaks like an Egyptian.

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YOU SEE WHAT YOU BELIEVE

SHULI MEYER ('16)

Parshat Shmot. Take a second to just internalize the words. From my limited knowledge of Torah, this parsha seems to arguably be one of the most monumental. In just six short perakim, this parsha covers the origins of our Egyptian enslavement, the decree to throw Jewish babies in the Nile, the birth of Moshe, the meeting and marriage of Moshe and Tziporah, the burning bush, the first installment of miracles, the increase of slave labor, a confrontation between Moshe and Hashem and much, much more!

Any parsha detailing any part of Moshe's life is powerful, and this parsha records his life from birth through adulthood and the introduction of his mission. So, with all that happens in this parsha, how was I supposed to pick one topic to discuss? Eventually, I settled on one of the more significant and unusual events of this parsha: the burning bush. Specifically, God's side of the conversation at the burning bush can, if permitted, change the course of our own relationship with God.

At the top of the mountain, Moshe tells Hashem, "Behold, when I will come to the children of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you', and they ask me, 'What is His name?', what shall I say to them?" (Shmot 3:13). In all honesty, this is a crazy question for Bnei Yisrael and for Moshe to ask! How could Bnei Yisrael not know Hashem's name. Even if they didn't, why didn't Moshe know how to respond? However, this question has even more depth; if understood correctly, Bnei Yisrael were asking more than, "What's your name?". With this question, Bnei Yisrael and Moshe on their behalf are asking Hashem, "Who are you? What is your essence?" Can you imagine standing before the Creator and asking Him a question like that?

The book of Shmot, which actually means "names," teaches that the essence of a person is captured in their name. Shmot takes place in Egypt during our slavery and in the desert, both places in which the Jews lost their names, their identities. After the brothers and the original seventy Jews who entered Egypt died, the Jews are almost undeserving of names because the last of that righteous generation has perished. (The Jews do eventually become deserving of their names again, but that's not really what this Dvar Torah is about). So, after Moshe asks this jolting question of "Who are you?", Hashem answers, "אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה" - "I will be what I will be" (3:14). What does that even mean? Is that supposed to appease the Jewish nation and serve as an acceptable answer? In all honesty, it should and will. Again, if understood correctly, this answer can be more than just an answer; it can be an understanding of how to approach God.

Mrs. Kanner gave our class a beautiful insight into the deeper meaning behind "אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה", which literally translates into "I will but what I will be." For Hashem's answer to be understood, we must interpret it to mean, "I will be that which you believe me to be." God will not force you to believe in Him nor will God prove Himself to you; belief in Him must come directly from *your* free will and *your* choice. Ultimately, as much as we may try to express God, God is simply unquantifiable. God is **Hashem**, **The** name, **The** essence: the epitome of everything. Eventually, all is traced back to God and the Book of Shmot, beginning with Parshat Shmot. The essence of anything must be traced back to **The** name, **The** essence Himself.

EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE

SAUL LEN ('16)

Counting and naming are two of the many expressions of love and happiness. When a barista at Starbucks is called by the name on her nametag, it brings unbelievable amounts of joy to her. Similarly, after receiving a significant sum of money, like a paycheck, a person will count his or her money over and over again to express joy over the money. Whether the recipient of the love is a child's rock collection or Bnei Yisrael, counting and naming anything shows one's affection for it.

At the beginning of Parshat Shmot, we learn that the twelve brothers have now passed away and the Jews have entered *galut* in Mitzrayim. Our ancestors are put through so much misery during this time and it seems like Hashem doesn't care that they are slaves. However, the truth is that He cares immensely. As soon as this parsha begins, the Torah repeats the names of the brothers who originally came down to Mitzrayim, and counts their total number of 70, which was just mentioned a few parshiyot ago.

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Rabbi Lanner continued

Pharaoh understood that difference and, it goes without saying, so did Hashem. God wants us and needs us to have that experience because that's precisely what our religion demands of us. Everywhere we go, we keep an eye and ear open: where can I find a minyan...where can I hear a shiur...where can I give tzedakah...where's the kosher restaurant... where is my next opportunity to be the best person that I can be?

Attias continued

However, he is also a Midianite; Moshe runs away from Egypt to Midian, where he spends 40 years of his life and makes his home. So when Moshe asks, "Who am I?", it is not only that he feels unworthy of leadership, but he also feels uninvolved! He may have been born a Jew, but he did not grow up as one or live as one! So how can he become their leader without relating to them? Furthermore, why should he become their leader if he is no longer a part of them? Moshe could have lived a life of ease as an Egyptian prince. Even after he was forced to leave, he could have lived a peaceful life as a shepherd in Midian. So why then did Moshe accept God's request?

The first hint is the name that Moshe gives his son: Gershom, meaning "a stranger in a foreign land." Moshe may have lived in Midian, but Midian was only *where* he was and not *who* he was. The true hint, however, is in the verse, "When Moshe was grown, he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labor" (2:11). Moshe may have lived in the palace, but he never once forgot who he really was. Although he wasn't physically suffering with his brothers, he was suffering with them emotionally. He felt their pain, identified with their suffering, and could therefore not walk away.

So when Moshe asks, "Who am I?", he knows the answer in his heart, which is why God does not directly answer it. Moshe knows that he is neither an Egyptian nor a Midianite. He knows he is a Jew and therefore cannot take the opportunity to live a peaceful life while his brothers are suffering in Egypt.

Len continued

The counting and naming are both in their own way proving the same point: Hashem loves us, Bnei Yisrael. The Torah lists the names of the brothers and the exact numbers of Jews who came down to Mitzrayim to underline their common denominator: their Jewish identity. He wanted to teach Bnei Yisrael that they should act as a united nation because they are His chosen nation.

On the other hand, Hashem's naming of each individual person also expresses the opposite. It shows the importance of individualism and how each person should try to connect to Hashem at his or her own level. In each way, Hashem is ultimately expressing his love for Bnei Yisrael; he loves us as a collective nation because He chose us, but he also loves each and every Jew for who they are as an individual. The point is, Hashem always love the Jewish people, even when we are in exile. Even when times are tough and things aren't going the exact way you want them to, remember that Hashem is standing right beside you, watching over you and helping you with your struggles because He loves and cares for you.

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