

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Moses' second question to G-d at the burning bush was, Who are you? "So I will go to the Israelites and say, 'Your fathers' G-d sent me to you.' They will immediately ask me what His name is. What shall I say to them?" (Ex. 3:13). G-d's reply, Ehyeh asher ehyeh, wrongly translated in almost every Christian Bible as something like "I am that I am," deserves an essay in its own right (I deal with it in my books *Future Tense* and *The Great Partnership*).

His first question, though, was, *Mi anochi*, "Who am I?" (Ex. 3:11).

"Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?" said Moses to G-d. "And how can I possibly get the Israelites out of Egypt?" On the surface the meaning is clear. Moses is asking two things. The first: who I am to be worthy of so great a mission? The second: how can I possibly succeed?

G-d answers the second. "Because I will be with you." You will succeed because I am not asking you to do it alone. I am not really asking you to do it at all. I will be doing it for you. I want you to be My representative, My mouthpiece, My emissary and My voice.

G-d never answered the first question. Perhaps in a strange way Moses answered himself. In Tanakh as a whole, the people who turn out to be the most worthy are the ones who deny they are worthy at all. The prophet Isaiah, when charged with his mission, said, 'I am a man of unclean lips' (Is. 6:5). Jeremiah said, 'I cannot speak, for I am a child' (Jer. 1:6). David, Israel's greatest king, echoed Moses' words, 'Who am I?' (2 Samuel 7:18). Jonah, sent on a mission by G-d, tried to run away. According to Rashbam, Jacob was about to run away when he found his way blocked by the man/angel with whom he wrestled at night (Rashbam to Gen. 32:23).

The heroes of the Bible are not figures from Greek or any other kind of myth. They are not people possessed of a sense of destiny, determined from an early age to achieve fame. They do not have what the Greeks called *megalopsychia*, a proper sense of their own worth, a gracious and lightly worn superiority. They did not go to Eton or Oxford. They were not born to rule. They were people who doubted their own abilities. There were times when they felt like giving up. Moses,

Elijah, Jeremiah and Jonah reached points of such despair that they prayed to die. They became heroes of the moral life against their will. There was work to be done-G-d told them so-and they did it. It is almost as if a sense of smallness is a sign of greatness. So G-d never answered Moses' question, "Why me?"

But there is another question within the question. "Who am I?" can be not just a question about worthiness. It can also be a question about identity. Moses, alone on Mount Horeb/Sinai, summoned by G-d to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, is not just speaking to G-d when he says those words. He is also speaking to himself. "Who am I?"

There are two possible answers. The first: Moses is a prince of Egypt. He had been adopted as a baby by Pharaoh's daughter. He had grown up in the royal palace. He dressed like an Egyptian, looked and spoke like an Egyptian. When he rescued Jethro's daughters from some rough shepherds, they go back and tell their father, "An Egyptian saved us" (2:19). His very name, Moses, was given to him by Pharaoh's daughter (Ex. 2:10). It was, presumably, an Egyptian name (in fact, *Mses*, as in *Ramses*, is the ancient Egyptian word for "child". The etymology given in the Torah, that Moses means "I drew him from the water," tells us what the word suggested to Hebrew speakers). So the first answer is that Moses was an Egyptian prince.

The second was that he was a Midianite. For, although he was Egyptian by upbringing, he had been forced to leave. He had made his home in Midian, married a Midianite woman Zipporah, daughter of a Midianite priest and was "content to live" there, quietly as a shepherd. We tend to forget that he spent many years there. He left Egypt as a young man and was already eighty years old at the start of his mission when he first stood before Pharaoh (Ex. 7:7). He must have spent the overwhelming majority of his adult life in Midian, far away from the Israelites on the one hand and the Egyptians on the other. Moses was a Midianite.

So when Moses asks, "Who am I?" it is not just that he feels himself unworthy. He feels himself uninvolved. He may have been Jewish by birth, but he had not suffered the fate of his people. He had not grown up as a Jew. He had not lived among Jews. He had good reason to doubt that the Israelites would even recognise him as one of them. How, then, could he become their leader? More penetratingly, why should he even think of becoming their leader? Their fate was not

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NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.
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his. He was not part of it. He was not responsible for it. He did not suffer from it. He was not implicated in it.

What is more, the one time he had actually tried to intervene in their affairs- he killed an Egyptian taskmaster who had killed an Israelite slave, and the next day tried to stop two Israelites from fighting one another-his intervention was not welcomed. "Who made you ruler and judge over us?" they said to him. These are the first recorded words of an Israelite to Moses. He had not yet dreamed of being a leader and already his leadership was being challenged.

Consider, now, the choices Moses faced in his life. On the one hand he could have lived as a prince of Egypt, in luxury and at ease. That might have been his fate had he not intervened. Even afterward, having been forced to flee, he could have lived out his days quietly as a shepherd, at peace with the Midianite family into which he had married. It is not surprising that when G-d invited him to lead the Israelites to freedom, he resisted.

Why then did he accept? Why did G-d know that he was the man for the task? One hint is contained in the name he gave his first son. He called him Gershom because, he said, "I am a stranger in a foreign land" (2:22). He did not feel at home in Midian. That was where he was but not who he was.

But the real clue is contained in an earlier verse, the prelude to his first intervention. "When Moses was grown, he began to go out to his own people, and he saw their hard labour" (2:11). These people were his people. He may have looked like an Egyptian but he knew that ultimately he was not. It was a transforming moment, not unlike when the Moabite Ruth said to her Israelite mother in law Naomi, "Your people will be my people and your G-d my G-d" (Ruth 1:16). Ruth was un-Jewish by birth. Moses was un-Jewish by upbringing. But both knew that they, when they saw suffering and identified with the sufferer, they could not walk away.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik called this a covenant of fate, brit goral. It lies at the heart of Jewish identity to this day. There are Jews who believe and those who don't. There are Jews who practise and those who don't. But there are few Jews indeed who, when their people are suffering, can walk away saying, This has nothing to do with me.

Maimonides, who defines this as "separating yourself from the community" (poresh mi-darkhei ha-tsibbur, Hilkhos Teshuva 3:11), says that it is one of the

sins for which you are denied a share in the world to come. This is what the Hagaddah means when it says of the wicked son that "because he excludes himself from the collective, he denies a fundamental principle of faith." What fundamental principle of faith? Faith in the collective fate and destiny of the Jewish people.

Who am I? asked Moses, but in his heart he knew the answer. I am not Moses the Egyptian or Moses the Midianite. When I see my people suffer I am, and cannot be other than, Moses the Jew. And if that imposes responsibilities on me, then I must shoulder them. For I am who I am because my people are who they are.

That is Jewish identity, then and now. © 2011
Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd a new king rose up over Egypt who did not know Joseph" .” (Exodus 1:8) The Book of Exodus takes us from the foundations of a family in Genesis to the development of a nation. Ironically, the first time the children of Israel are referred to as a nation is after the family of Jacob arrives in Egypt and became "numerous and powerful" there (Exodus 1:9). The segue between the books is the towering persona of Joseph, to whom Genesis devotes 13 chapters (Jacob only merits 10-and-a-half). Is it not odd that Joseph, who is called ha'tzaddik (the righteous one) by our sages, is not deemed worthy of being the fourth patriarch? Furthermore, what is there about Moses that causes him to be singled out by G-d as the savior of Israel?

Let us begin with Joseph. I believe he merits the appellation "tzaddik" because, as a stranger in a strange land, he nevertheless resists the seduction of Potiphar's wife and refrains from committing adultery (Genesis 39:7-12). However, he still cannot be counted as one of the patriarchs.

G-d promises Abraham, the first patriarch, the legacy of a nation, guaranteeing him eternal "seed" who will eventually live within the borders of Israel. Joseph, from his teenage years, when he dreamt of sheaves of grain, hankered after the lush agricultural prosperity of Egypt rather than the more arid grazing lands of Judea.

Indeed, throughout his lifetime, he dedicated himself to the economic advancement of Egypt - far removed from the Abrahamic family and the Land of Israel.

But there is an even more powerful reason for Joseph's exclusion. The Abrahamic covenant is predicated upon the principle that every human being is created in the image of G-d (Genesis 1:26,27). It is this axiom that makes every person inviolable and free - ideas that are developed in the Exodus from Egypt and the commandments given at Sinai. This is why G-d chose and loved Abraham, "since he will command his

children to guard the way of the Lord to do compassionate righteousness and moral justice" (Genesis 18:19).

Enslaving a human being is the antithesis of compassionate righteousness and moral justice. Through Abraham "all the families of the earth are to be blessed" (Genesis 12:3), but Joseph's economic policies by which he enslaved the entire Egyptian populace to Pharaoh - who owned them and their lands - and resettled them wherever he wanted in Egypt, was directly contrary to the Abrahamic obligation (Genesis 47:18-27).

The Hebrews, who were shepherds rather than landowners, were exempt from the enslavement, as well as re-settlement (Exodus 47:27).

I suggest that the subsequent enslavement of the Hebrews by a Pharaoh "who did not know Joseph" was a divine punishment of those whose ancestor enslaved all of Egypt. In his cavalier and degrading treatment of the Egyptians, Joseph had turned away from the Abrahamic covenant.

Moses is the mirror-image of Joseph - if Joseph was the family member who yearned for the greener pastures of Egypt, Moses was the prince of the Court of Pharaoh who identified with and reached out to his enslaved brethren (Exodus 2:11). Much more than that, "he saw (va'yar) their burdened pains, and saw (va'yar) an Egyptian man smiting a Hebrew man from among his brothers" (ibid).

[The Hebrew word va'yar means to see suffering and to do something for the victim. This is the meaning of the verse in the Scroll of Esther, "How so would I be able to see [the same verb as in va'yar, v'ra'iti] the evil which has befallen my nation [and not act to prevent it], how would I be able to see [the same verb] the evil which has befallen my nation [and not act to prevent it], how would I be able to see the destruction of my birthplace [without attempting to forestall its occurrence]" (Scroll of Esther 8:6). Likewise, this is the only way to understand the conclusion of the Grace After Meals, "I was young and I also grew old, and I never saw a righteous person forsaken, or his children scrounging for bread - [without attempting to help them]."

Hence, the very next verse records, "And [Moses] slew the Egyptian and hid [his corpse] in the sand" (Exodus 2:12). When the oppressor is about to murder the oppressed, when the master is about to smite the slave, then the only correct expression of "compassionate righteousness and moral justice" is to slay the oppressor-master.

Moses, in acting in the way of ethical monotheism, in identifying with the Hebrews and in attempting to spark the rebellion which would eventually free them and take them to the Promised Land, is the "repair" for the "Egyptianization" of Joseph.

Moses our teacher is the proper covenantal continuation of Jacob. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd she (Yocheved) wasn't able to hide him (her newborn) any longer" (Sh'mos 2:3). Why wasn't she able to hide him any longer? "Because the Egyptians counted from when [Amram] remarried her, and she gave birth after six months and a day, and they checked on her after nine months" (Rashi). Since Moshe was born almost three months prematurely, the Egyptian enforcers making sure all male infants were thrown into the Nile didn't know he was born yet. Before they came looking for him, Yocheved put him in a box and placed it in a body of water. Although Midrash HaGadol and Targum Yonasan give a similar explanation for the three months Yocheved was able to hide her baby, the Talmud (Sotah 12a) says she was pregnant before the three-month separation from Amram, and the Egyptians counted from when they remarried. Either way, Moshe was born three months before the Egyptians checked to see if Yocheved had given birth. In other words the decree that "all sons that are born are to be thrown into the Nile (Sh'mos 1:22) was still in affect three months after Moshe was born. However, Rashi (1:22), this time quoting the Talmud (ibid), had told us that Pharaoh's astrologers knew which day Moshe ("the savior of Israel") was born. If they knew Israel's savior had been born three months earlier, why would they still be searching for newborns to drown in the river?

It should be noted that according to Sh'mos Rabbah (1:18), the Egyptian astrologers "saw" when Yocheved became pregnant with Israel's savior, and the decree to throw all newborn sons into the Nile was issued and in affect for the next nine months. If the astrologers didn't know when Moshe was actually born, his premature birth would not affect the length of the decree; it was issued for nine months from his conception, and the Egyptians didn't check on Yocheved until nine months after she got remarried. However, the Talmud (and Rashi) say there were three stages to Pharaoh's decree, with the third stage, when even Egyptian newborn were also thrown into the Nile, enacted because his astrologers said that Israel's savior had been born on that day. If they knew he had been born on the 7th of Adar, why was the decree to throw newborn sons into the Nile still in affect three months later, on the 6th of Sivan?

The Egyptians had two separate concerns. They were disgusted by the population growth of the Children of Israel (1:12) and afraid of its consequences (1:9-10), and were worried about their savior. Chizkuni points out that even though throwing anyone into the Nile after Moshe was already born wouldn't help the

latter concern, maintaining the decree would still curb population growth, and was therefore kept intact even after Israel's savior was born. However, the Talmud also says (12b) that the decree was halted after Yocheved put Moshe into the water, as the astrologers "saw" that he was already in the water. Obviously, the decree was maintained to try to eliminate the child that would grow up to be Israel's savior, and was therefore kept in force until they knew he was already thrown into the water, when it became unnecessary so was cancelled. Rashi, in his commentary on Sotah 12a, says explicitly that because the astrologers "saw" that he wasn't smitten yet, "the decree was maintained until he was thrown into the water." The question remains, though, why the Egyptians would need to seek out those who had just been born rather than only trying to find previously-born children who had not been tossed into the Nile. It is possible that only Pharaoh's inner circle knew all the details, including that Israel's savior had already been born. Rather than making those enforcing the decree distinguish between those born this week and those born last week (the week after Moshe was born), and then extending the exemption to those born within the last two weeks (then the last month, then two months, and then three months), the instructions from Pharaoh's palace stayed the same even after Moshe was born, rescinded only after they "saw" that he was in the water.

Rambam, in his "Letter Regarding Astrology," dismisses the possibility that astrologers can reliably predict the future. His primary reasons for dismissing astrology were that the science was bad and that free will can change things, making any prediction (even if the science worked) dependant on any choices made through free will not affecting the outcome that had been set in nature (see <http://rabbidmk.posterous.com/rambam-on-mazal-1>).

Obviously, Rambam couldn't have known for sure that the astrological science used in ancient Egypt was the exact same science people in his generation were relying on. He wrote his letter in order to discourage the people of Lunil from following the astrology of their time; it wouldn't matter if the science Pharaoh relied on was any better, since the science the people Rambam was addressing relied on was bad. Nevertheless, Rambam did tell them that even if it seems that some sages in the Talmud believed in astrology (not that it was permitted, but that it worked), it was only a minority opinion. This implies that the astrology discussed in the Talmud (at least according to Rambam's understanding) was the same as it was in Rambam's time, as otherwise he could have said that the Talmudic sages were not referring to the astrology used in Lunil at the time. [Although it is possible Rambam felt he could more effectively dissuade the people of Lunil from using astrology by dismissing it entirely rather than differentiating between the astrology discussed in the

Talmud and the astrology used in Lunil in the 11th century.]

Either way, astrology could never be relied on, even if it was accurate, because free will could change the outcome of what the stars indicated, especially if G-d decided to override nature (such as when Avraham had children despite the stars indicating that he couldn't, see Rashi on B'raishis 15:5). When it comes to explaining the narrative surrounding Moshe's birth, how accurate astrology was is sort of beside-the-point, as they believed it was accurate, and acted based on what they thought to be true. This is so whether the science was bad or not, since they themselves trusted the science. Nevertheless, if there was absolutely nothing to it, this discussion doesn't start, as the Egyptians couldn't have known when Israel's savior was either conceived or born. The Talmud saying that the astrologers knew when Yocheved put Moshe in the water does indicate that our actions change what can be seen in the stars, which runs counter to Rambam's premise (and why he must say it is a minority opinion).

Sh'mos Rabbah (1:18) also equates Yocheved putting her son in the water with tricking the astrologers, with a slight nuance that can make a huge difference: Rather than the astrologers actually being fooled because Moshe was in the water, Yocheved put him in the water in order to fool them. Were they fooled? If they could see changes in the stars, they could have been. If, however, all astrology can show is the starting point, what would happen if there is no intervention (either divine intervention, from G-d, or intervention via the divine part within us, the soul, manifested through free will), then the astrologers wouldn't be able to see that Moshe was in the water, even if Yocheved thought they would. This is consistent with the astrologers "seeing" when Moshe was born by knowing when Yocheved was supposed to become pregnant and adding nine months, rather than "seeing" when he was actually born. [This only works if Moshe was born prematurely, but not if Yocheved became pregnant before she separated from Amram. If Rashi's words (1:22) can be understood inexactly ("should have been born" rather than "was born"), it would explain why Rashi (2:3) said he was born prematurely even though the Talmud says Yocheved was pregnant earlier (see Mizrahi and Tosfos Rid). When explaining the Talmud, Rashi is limited to its perspective that astrologers can see changes; when explaining the verses, he can do so in a way that is consistent with Sh'mos Rabbah.]

If astrologers could see what would happen if nothing was tweaked, the Egyptians could have assumed (especially if most people do not exercise their free will and G-d rarely intervenes in the natural world) that Israel's savior would be born nine months after his mother conceived. This would be the day that Pharaoh had the Egyptian newborn sons also thrown into the Nile. Rather than knowing when Moshe was born, they would "know" when he was supposed to

be born. If G-d circumvented what the stars indicated by causing Moshe to be born three months earlier, giving his mother the chance to hide him before the Egyptians looked for him, we can understand why Pharaoh decreed that Egyptian babies should be thrown into the Nile three months after Moshe was actually born; they thought they knew when he was born, based on the stars telling them when he was supposed to be born.
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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Who were the midwives that were asked by Pharaoh to kill the newborn Jewish males? (Exodus 1:15, 16) Their identity is critical because they deserve a tremendous amount of credit. In the end, at great personal risk, they "did not do as the King of Egypt commanded them, but saved the boys." (Exodus 1:17)

Rashi insists that the midwives were Jewish women. They were Yocheved and Miriam, the mother and sister of Moshe respectively. For Rashi, the term meyardot ha-ivriyot (Exodus 1:15) is to be understood literally, as the Hebrew midwives.

Sforno disagrees. He insists that the midwives were actually non-Jews. For Sforno, meyardot ha-ivriyot is to be understood as the midwives of the Hebrews.

What stands out as almost shocking in Rashi's interpretation is the actual request. Pharaoh asks Jews to murder other Jews, believing they would commit heinous crimes against their own people. Tragically, this phenomenon has occurred at certain times in history-tyrants successfully convinced Jews to turn against their own people.

On the other hand, what stands out in Sforno's interpretation is the response. In the end, the non-Jewish midwives, at great personal risk, were prepared to save Jews. This has also occurred in history-the preparedness of non-Jews to stand up to authority and intervene on behalf of Jews.

Sforno mirrors the time in which he lived. As part of renaissance Italy in the 15th century, he was a universalist par excellence. He believed that non-Jews would stand up and risk their lives to help Jews.

Rashi, hundreds of years before, lived in a different world. Living before the Crusades, he could never imagine that non-Jews would stand up against the Pharaoh and save Jews.

Without this watershed moment in our history of standing up in the face of evil, there may have been no nation of Israel. Yet, there is no consensus as to the identity of these heroines. Only G-d knows for sure.

In this world where heroism sadly is defined by who sinks the winning shot or has the most money or sings the greatest music, we must remember this important lesson. Most of the time, we don't know who the true heroes are. Many who are given honor are

undeserving. Others, who deserve honor, remain forever unknown.

It is G-d alone, who really knows. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and President of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School - the Modern and Open Orthodox Rabbinical School. He is Senior Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale, a Modern and Open Orthodox congregation of 850 families. He is also National President of AMCHA - the Coalition for Jewish Concerns.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

We find many instances in the Torah where strangers, seemingly bystanders who are unconnected to the main characters and events of the narrative, play a pivotal and decisive role in the unfolding of the story. In a sense, they become the catalyst for all that occurs later.

The escaped refugee who comes to tell Avraham about the capture of Lot, the man who finds Yosef wandering lost in the fields in search of his brothers are but examples of this recurring theme throughout biblical narrative. In this week's parsha the daughter of the Pharaoh plays this unknowing role in Jewish history and world civilization.

Going down to the Nile with her maidservants she spies the small floating crib of the infant Moshe and she reaches out for it before the crocodiles can get to it. She thereupon sees the crying infant and even though the baby is from the Jewish slaves she takes pity upon him and secures a wet nurse for him and eventually brings him home to the palace where she raises him as her son.

And out of this strange and unlikely sequence of events, the great Moshe emerges to eventually lead the Jewish slaves out of Egyptian bondage and to bring them to Torah and eternity at the revelation at Mount Sinai. And though it is certainly G-d that oversees the unfolding of all human scenarios, it is through human beings making choices and decisions and behaving according to those choices that the story of humankind continues to unfold.

Nothing compelled the Pharaoh's daughter to be compassionate towards a defenseless Jewish child in danger. It was her choice and out of that choice the fate of all humanity is allowed to take a positive turn.

The tradition of the Jews is that this daughter of the Pharaoh was named Batya-the daughter of G-d Himself, so to speak. She is remembered in that her name has been given to myriad Jewish women over the thousands of years of Jewish existence. The continuing custom of naming Jewish women after her expresses the gratitude of the Jews for her life saving act and her human compassion.

The Talmud teaches us that the crib floating in the river was seemingly out of her reach and yet she stretched forth her hand to attempt to bring it to her.

When human beings do all that they can for a noble cause or kind deed then many times Heaven takes over. Her hand somehow became elongated sufficiently to bring the crib into her reach and the baby's salvation.

Again, it is this almost mystical combination of human choice and Heaven's guidance that accomplishes this forward thrust in the story of humankind. And the Torah emphasizes that it was not sufficient for Batya to temporarily save the infant from death but that she pursued the matter of the child's welfare to the utmost, finally raising him as her son in the royal palace of the Pharaoh.

Many times we do good and compassionate deeds but we do them partially not really completing the task. The Talmud teaches us that "If one begins a mitzvah we say to him: 'Complete it.'" Batya's immortality is assured amongst all of Israel for her complete and voluntary act of compassion, goodness and mercy. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The phrase "a land flowing with milk and honey" appears many times in the Torah as an expression praising the fruits of Eretz Yisrael. There are times when the Torah uses other expressions, such as: "The vine and the fig tree" [Devarim 8:8]; "Every man under his vine and under his fig tree" [Melachim I 5:5]; "For the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have given of their riches" [Yoel 2:22]. But why does the Torah praise the milk produced by the animals in the land and not the fruits which are the source of the milk? In addition, when the scouts returned from their mission and told about the praises of the land-"it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit" [Bamidbar 13:27] -- why did they bring with them only "a vine and a bunch of grapes... and some figs..." [13:23]? Why didn't they bring a jug of milk with them?

Rabbi Reuven Margaliyot gives a remarkable and quite novel answer to this question (although he is able to explain only some of the Midrashim and not all of them).

In last week's Torah portion, we read with respect to Yehuda that "he will wash his clothing in wine and his cloak in the blood of grapes" [Bereishit 49:11]. This refers to two kinds of wine-white and red. In the Midrash it is written, "He will wash his clothing in wine'-this is referring to 'chalav' (milk?) and 'his cloak in the blood of grapes'- this is referring to the red wine." [Bereishit Rabba 98]. In Shir Hashirim, "I have drunk my wine with my milk" [5:1], is interpreted in the Targum as "red wine and white wine." Torat Shlomo brings another

proof from the book "Ma'adanei Yom Tov" quoting a scholar from Eretz Yisrael that at the time when the book was written white wine was called "chalbon," and that it was used to wash clothing instead of water. This is what Yaacov meant when he said, "white teeth from 'chalav'" [Bereishit 49:12] -- that white wine leads to happiness. Thus, the word "chalav" means not only milk but also white wine. The "land of milk and honey" is a land which can be praised for its white wine and for the sweetness of its fruit. The Torah mentions the white wine before the honey because this is the best and most wholesome type of wine, and for this reason its blessing is recited first (Maharsha, Ketuvot 111).

In a note in his book, Rabbi Maraliyot brings another proof of this idea, quoting Rabbi Shabtai Segal, based on the fact that the tribes of Gad and Reuven chose to take possession of the other side of the Jordan River because "it is a land for livestock, and your servants have livestock" [Bamidbar 32:4]. But this is hard to understand: Why is it written in the tractate of Bechorot that the first fruits of Bikurim are not brought from the land across the Jordan because "it does not flow with milk and honey"? If it is indeed a land suited to growing sheep, it must of necessity give good yields of milk from the animals! This implies that the word "chalav" is not milk, but as noted above refers to white wine.

Another light note is attributed to Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Milk and honey are items which are extracted from a source that is at first glance impure, but they are in fact kosher. Milk comes out of a living animal, and honey comes from an insect. This is the real praise of Eretz Yisrael, that it "flows with milk and honey"-it can transform something that is impure to a pure substance, and Jews who come to the land who are sick in their souls and in their deeds can be cured and be returned to good health. © 2011 Rabbi A. Bazak and Machon Zomet

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays the true potential of the Jewish people and their unlimited ability. The prophet Yeshaya opens with a descriptive expression about the Jewish exile and exodus from Egypt. He states, "Those who are coming will strike roots as Yaakov and will blossom and bud as Yisroel." (27:6) These words refer to the drastic contradistinction between the Jewish people who struck roots in Egypt and those who merited the exodus. Yeshaya says that they entered with the identity of Yaakov and left as Yisroel. This change of name typified the spiritual ascent of the Jewish people which began from the downtrodden status of the galus Jew, Yaakov, and resulted with the supreme status of Yisroel. These names truly reflect the incredible spiritual growth of the

Jewish people who developed from a nearly assimilated group rising to the lofty kingdom of priests.

In this week's parsha the S'forno reveals to us a significant dimension regarding the Jewish people's conduct in Egypt. In describing the Jewish population explosion in Egypt the Torah says, "And the children of Israel were fruitful and multiplied in swarms and proliferated and became overpowering in excessive measures." (Sh'mos 1:7) The S'forno takes note of this peculiar expression "multiplying in swarms" which seems to compare the Jewish people to swarms of insects and crawling creatures. He explains that this comparison refers to the prevalent mannerisms of the Jewish people in those days. They fell prey to Egyptian culture and were transformed into of a free thinking, undisciplined race. This comment reflects the words of Chazal which indicate that during the early years in Egypt the Jews roamed the streets of Egypt. They preoccupied themselves with Egyptian practices and freely participated in Egypt's immoral style of amusement and enjoyment.

The S'forno, in his commentary to previous passages, informs us that this severe spiritual descent transpired only after the passing of the initial pious group who entered Egypt. Once the devout were out of sight, the Jewish people began viewing Egypt as their homeland and became acclimated to her alien culture. This, however, was the description of their earliest era. Miraculously, after years of heavy servitude and torturous slavery, this same Jewish people emerged as a nation of sanctity and dignity, each worthy of the highest level of prophecy. At this point they qualified for the revelation of Hashem at Har Sinai and were temporarily elevated to the spiritual level of the angels. The prophet Yeshaya reflects upon this early experience to demonstrate the Jewish people's true potential. From it we learn that even after digressing for an extended period to the level of swarming creatures the Jewish people's potential remained that of the angels themselves.

The prophet Yeshaya continues and predicts that this pattern will reoccur amongst the Jewish nation. He begins with sharp words of reprimand to the ten tribes of Israel and calls upon them to remove every trace of idolatry from their kingdom. He warns them and says, "Woe unto you, crown of arrogance; drunkards of Ephraim. The splendor of your glory will be likened to a withering bud." (28:1) This refers to the imminent experience of destruction and exile soon to befall the ten tribes. Yeshaya then continues and turns to the remaining Jewish segment, the Judean kingdom, and blames them for following a similar path. To them Yeshaya says, "And they too were negligent through wine and strayed through intoxication...for all of their tables were replete with refuse without any remaining space." (27:7,8) These passages refer to the sinful plunge of the Judean empire into idolatry. Although this repulsive practice originated from the ten tribes it

eventually took hold amongst the Judean kingdom and they also seriously strayed from the proper path.

But, Yeshaya inserts here some encouraging words and says, "On that day Hashem will be a crown of splendor and a diadem of glory for the remnant of His people." (28:5) The Radak (ad loc.) explains Yeshaya's reason for expressing these comforting words in the midst of his heavy rebuke. Radak sees these words as a reference to the Judean kingdom's future fortune, meriting one of the greatest miracles in Jewish history. In their near future, the mighty King Sanherev would attempt to engage in a heavy war against the Jewish people. In response to this Hashem would perform an awesome miracle and rescue His people without suffering one casualty. This miracle would result from an unprecedented campaign by King Chizkiyahu to proliferate Torah knowledge throughout the Judean kingdom. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 94b) records that during this illustrious era every single person-man or woman, boy or girl- was proficient in the most complicated laws of ritual cleanliness. This very same kingdom who, one generation earlier was so heavily involved in idolatry, would soon cleanse itself from all sin and become totally immersed in Torah study and rituals. Through this enormous comeback, the prophet demonstrated the unlimited potential of the Jewish people. Although they may seriously digress in their spiritual ways, they do remain capable of a perfect reversal. Yeshaya stressed the phenomena that over the span of but one generation the Jewish people went from total spiritual bankruptcy to almost unprecedented perfection, meriting one of the greatest miracles ever seen.

In this spirit, Yeshaya brings the haftorah to a close and relays Hashem's heartwarming statement to our patriarch Yaakov. Hashem says, "Now, don't be embarrassed Yaakov, and don't blush from shame because when your children will see My hand in their midst they will sanctify My name... and exalt the Hashem of Israel." (29: 22, 23) The undertone here is that in the future the Jewish people will severely stray from the proper path. Their actions will be so inexcusable that their beloved patriarch Yaakov will be embarrassed and ashamed of them. But Hashem reminds Yaakov to focus on the unlimited potential of his children, the Jewish people. Although they can and do stray from the path, this is only when Hashem conceals Himself from them. In spiritual darkness, they lose sight of true values and, being amongst the nations of the world, adopt foreign values and customs. But the moment Hashem returns to them with His open hand, they will regain their true status of greatness. They will quickly return to Hashem and follow His perfect ways, sanctifying and exalting Him with their every action. Hashem told our patriarch Yaakov to overlook his children's present spiritual level and to focus on their potential greatness. The time will surely arrive when Yaakov, after all the long, hard years of servitude and

exile will merit Hashem's revelation. Undoubtedly the response to this will be an immediate return to the lofty levels of spirituality and Yaakov, now Yisroel, will praise and glorify Hashem's name for eternity. © 2011 Y. Ciner & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

When Yocheved and Miriam, the two midwives responsible for delivering the Jewish babies, were ordered by Paroh to kill all the newborn boys, they disobeyed a direct order, thereby risking their lives. In explaining this to us, the Torah says that G-d rewarded them, the nation prospered and multiplied, and G-d "built them houses" (1:20-21) -- not literal houses, but rather that their descendants would become great pillars of Jewish leadership and religion (Rashi). From the way the Passuk (verse) elucidates it, though, it seems that they were rewarded AND there were houses built for them. Were they rewarded twice? If so, why?

Rabbi Rubman points out that the Passuk says that it wasn't because they risked their lives that they were rewarded with great descendants, but because they feared G-d that they deserved it. The reason for the double-language is because they were 1) rewarded for risking their lives, and 2) houses were built based on their fear and respect of G-d. What's unique about these rewards is that their fear/respect of G-d is what warranted eternal reward, and NOT their life-risking actions. The Torah's message is that the motives behind our actions are sometimes more important than the acts themselves, even if the act is life threatening. The Torah's message is that it truly is the thought that counts. © 2011 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

In this week's parashah, we read of the exile and slavery of Bnei Yisrael and of the very beginning of the redemption. In the Pesach Haggadah we say, "If G-d had not taken us out of there, then we and our sons and our descendants would be subjugated to Pharaoh in Egypt." The question is well known: Why do we assume that we would still be in Egypt thousands of years later when, throughout world history, kingdoms rise and kingdoms fall? Who is to say that we would not have left Egypt in time through natural means? Furthermore, what is the purpose of speculating; didn't G-d promise Avraham that we would be redeemed?

R' Yitzchak Yerucham Borodiansky shlita (Yeshivat Kol Torah in Yerushalayim) explains: We find that Yaakov was afraid as he prepared to meet Esav, notwithstanding G-d's promise to protect him. Our Sages explain that his fear of Esav was due to his fear that he might have sinned and lost G-d's protection. This teaches that no promise can be relied upon to

counteract a sin, which is a rebellion against G-d. Similarly, once Bnei Yisrael sinned [either the brothers against Yosef, or their descendants by practicing idolatry in Egypt], G-d's promise was at risk of being voided.

Nevertheless, perhaps we might have been freed as history progressed? To answer this we need to understand that it was not a chance of history that Bnei Yisrael were slaves to Pharaoh. It was a manifestation of a Heavenly decree. Commenting on the verse (Devarim 4:34), "Has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation?" our Sages say, "Like a shepherd births a lamb from a ewe." This indicates how Bnei Yisrael were tied to Egypt by the decree of Heaven, and no historical event could have broken that bond if G-d had not brought about the Exodus. (Siach Yitzchak: Geulat Mitzrayim p.18)

"Bnei Yisrael were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong-very, very much so; and the land became filled with them." (1:7)

R' Yosef ben Moshe Tirani z"l (Maharit; 1568-1639) writes: No one, not even Pharaoh, could deny that the growth rate of Bnei Yisrael was miraculous. Therefore, perhaps the verse (1:9), "He said to his people, 'Behold! the people, Bnei Yisrael, are more numerous and stronger mimenu'" [usually translated "more numerous and stronger than we"] should be translated, "more numerous and stronger from Him." If this is the correct translation, Maharit continues, then the next verse, "Let us outsmart lo" [usually translated "it," referring to Bnei Yisrael] perhaps should be translated, "Let us outsmart Him," again referring to G-d. Indeed, our Sages say that Pharaoh said, "Let us outsmart the Redeemer of Bnei Yisrael." That, of course, is none other than G-d. (Tzofnat Panei'ach) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org



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