

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The sedra of Shemot, in a series of finely etched vignettes, paints a portrait of the life of Moses, culminating in the moment at which G-d appears to him in the bush that burns without being consumed. It is a key text of the Torah view of leadership, and every detail is significant. I want here to focus on just one passage in the long dialogue in which G-d summons Moses to undertake the mission of leading the Israelites to freedom -- a challenge which, no less than four times, Moses declines. I am unworthy, he says. I am not a man of words. Send someone else. It is the second refusal, however, which attracted special attention from the sages and led them to formulate one of their most radical interpretations. The Torah states: "Moses replied: 'But they will not believe me. They will not listen to me. They will say, 'G-d did not appear to you'.'" (4:1)

The sages, ultra-sensitive to nuances in the

text, evidently noticed three strange features of this response. The first is that G-d had already told Moses, "They will listen to you" (3:18). Moses' reply seems to contradict G-d's prior assurance. To be sure, the commentators offered various harmonising interpretations. Ibn Ezra suggests that G-d had told Moses that the elders would listen to him, whereas Moses expressed doubts about the mass of the people. Ramban says that Moses did not doubt that they would believe initially, but he thought that they would lose faith as soon as they saw that Pharaoh would not let them go. There are other explanations, but the fact remains that Moses was not satisfied by G-d's assurance. His own experience of the fickleness of the people (one of them, years earlier, had already said, "Who made you ruler and judge over us?") made him doubt that they would be easy to lead.

The second anomaly is in the signs that G-d gave Moses to authenticate his mission. The first (the staff that turns into a snake) and third (the water that turned into blood) reappear later in the story. They are signs that Moses and Aaron perform not only for the Israelites but also for the Egyptians. The second, however, does not reappear. G-d tells Moses to put his hand in his cloak. When he takes it out he sees that it has become "leprous as snow". What is the significance of this particular sign? The sages recalled that later, Miriam was punished with leprosy for speaking negatively about Moses (Bamidbar 12:10). In general they understood leprosy as a punishment for lashon hara, derogatory speech. Had Moses, perhaps, been guilty of the same sin?

The third detail is that, whereas Moses' other refusals focused on his own sense of inadequacy, here he speaks not about himself but about the people. They will not believe him. Putting these three points together, the sages arrived at the following comment: "Resh Lakish said: He who entertains a suspicion against the innocent will be bodily afflicted, as it is written, Moses replied: But they will not believe me. However, it was known to the Holy One blessed be He, that Israel would believe. He said to Moses: They are believers, the children of believers, but you will ultimately disbelieve. They are believers, as it is written, and the people believed (Ex. 4: 31). The children of believers [as it is written], and he [Abraham] believed in the Lord. But you will ultimately disbelieve, as it is said, [And the Lord said to Moses] Because you did not believe in Me (Num. 20:12). How do we know that he was afflicted? Because



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it is written: And the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand inside your cloak...' (Ex. 4:6)." (B.T. Shabbat 97a)

This is an extraordinary passage. Moses, it now becomes clear, was entitled to have doubts about his own worthiness for the task. What he was not entitled to do was to have doubts about the people. In fact, his doubts were amply justified. The people were fractious. Moses calls them a "stiff necked people". Time and again during the wilderness years they complained, sinned, and wanted to return to Egypt. Moses was not wrong in his estimate of their character. Yet G-d reprimanded him; indeed punished him by making his hand leprous. A fundamental principle of Jewish leadership is intimated here for the first time: a leader does not need faith in himself, but he must have faith in the people he is to lead.

This is an exceptionally important idea. The political philosopher Michael Walzer has written insightfully about social criticism, in particular about two stances the critic may take vis--vis those he criticises. On the one hand there is the critic as outsider. At some stage, beginning in ancient Greece: "Detachment was added to defiance in the self-portrait of the hero. The impulse was Platonic; later on it was Stoic and Christian. Now the critical enterprise was said to require that one leave the city, imagined for the sake of the departure as a darkened cave, find one's way, alone, outside, to the illumination of Truth, and only then return to examine and reprove the inhabitants. The critic-who-returns doesn't engage the people as kin; he looks at them with a new objectivity; they are strangers to his new-found Truth."

This is the critic as detached intellectual. The prophets of Israel were quite different. Their message, writes Johannes Lindblom, was "characterized by the principle of solidarity". "They are rooted, for all their anger, in their own societies," writes Walzer. Like the Shunamite woman (Kings 2 4:13), their home is "among their own people". They speak, not from outside, but from within. That is what gives their words power. They identify with those to whom they speak. They share their history, their fate, their calling, their covenant. Hence the peculiar pathos of the prophetic calling. They are the voice of G-d to the people, but they are also the voice of the people to G-d. That, according to the sages, was what G-d was teaching Moses: What matters is not whether they believe in you, but whether

you believe in them. Unless you believe in them, you cannot lead in the way a prophet must lead. You must identify with them and have faith in them, seeing not only their surface faults but also their underlying virtues. Otherwise, you will be no better than a detached intellectual -- and that is the beginning of the end. If you do not believe in the people, eventually you will not even believe in G-d. You will think yourself superior to them, and that is a corruption of the soul.

The classic text on this theme is Maimonides' Epistle on Martyrdom. Written in 1165, when Maimonides was thirty years old, it was occasioned by a tragic period in medieval Jewish history when an extremist Muslim sect, the Almohads, forced many Jews to convert to Islam under threat of death. One of the forced converts (they were called anusim; later they became known as marranos) asked a rabbi whether he might gain merit by practising as many of the Torah's commands as he could in secret. The rabbi sent back a dismissive reply. Now that he had forsaken his faith, he wrote, he would achieve nothing by living secretly as a Jew. Any Jewish act he performed would not be a merit but an additional sin.

Maimonides' Epistle is a work of surpassing spiritual beauty. He utterly rejects the rabbi's reply. Those who keep Judaism in secret are to be praised, not blamed. He quotes a whole series of rabbinic passages in which G-d rebukes prophets who criticised the people of Israel, including the one above about Moses. He then writes: "If this is the sort of punishment meted out to the pillars of the universe -- Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and the ministering angels -- because they briefly criticized the Jewish congregation, can one have an idea of the fate of the least among the worthless [i.e. the rabbi who criticized the forced converts] who let his tongue loose against Jewish communities of sages and their disciples, priests and Levites, and called them sinners, evildoers, gentiles, disqualified to testify, and heretics who deny the Lord G-d of Israel?"

The Epistle is a definitive expression of the prophetic task: to speak out of love for one's people; to defend them, see the good in them, and raise them to higher achievements through praise, not condemnation.

Who is a leader? To this, the Jewish answer is, one who identifies with his or her people, mindful of their faults, to be sure, but convinced also of their potential greatness and their preciousness in the sight of G-d. "Those people of whom you have doubts," said G-d to Moses, "are believers, the children of believers. They are My people, and they are your people. Just as you believe in Me, so you must believe in them." © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's parsha we are introduced to the most central figure in all of Jewish history -- even in all

civilized history, our teacher Moshe. The Torah, as is its wont, does not tell us many details about the life of Moshe from the time he was just past twenty years of age, fleeing from Pharaoh's wrath at his killing of an Egyptian taskmaster, until his reemergence as the leader of the enslaved Jewish people when he is already eighty years of age.

Legend has Moshe serving as a king of an African nation during this period of time. The Torah only relates to us how he chanced across the daughters of Yitro, saved them from the persecution of their fellow -- but male -- shepherds, eventually married one of them, Zipporah, and remained in the employ of his father-in-law, Yitro.

On the surface, at least, this is not much of a resume' for the greatest prophet, leader and lawgiver in all of human history. Yet strangely enough this is a template that repeats itself in Jewish history. We are taught: "Man sees only superficially with one's eyes while the Lord sees to the true heart and abilities of the person."

The great King David, the messianic forbearer of Jewish and human destiny, was overlooked even by the prophet Samuel as being worthy of founding the house of Jewish royalty. All of Jewish history, in fact all of human history, is nothing more than a collection of ironies, seeming coincidences and unexpected choices and events. All human history is truly a province of G-d's inscrutable will.

The Torah apparently does not desire leaders of Israel who had perfect backgrounds. The Talmud pithily teaches us that no one should be appointed as a public official unless he carries with him on his shoulders "a box of crawling reptiles."

In our raucous world of Israeli politics, this adage is many times to an extreme of observance. Nevertheless it is obvious that great leaders may emerge from strange places and backgrounds. In our own times great leaders and teachers of the Torah community gained prominence and influence even though they did not come from the normal yeshiva world track. Some were literally anonymous figures until their greatness in Torah and leadership somehow emerged in public view.

Background, yichus, family pedigree, education and previous experience are all certainly to be taken into account when choosing a mate, an employee, a leader and anyone to whom great responsibilities are to be assigned. But one should always be prepared for the unexpected in Jewish life and especially in leadership in Jewish society.

Moshe, David, the Gaon of Vilna and many others became the unlikely leaders of Israel through G-d's grace and their own diligence, talents, charisma and devotion to the G-d and the people of Israel. The rabbis again stated correctly "The people of Israel are never bereft and widowed without leadership." That leadership may arise from a surprising source but it

always does arise to guide and strengthen us. © 2013 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

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1: 8) Why is Joseph, the towering personality of the last four portions of the Book of Genesis, not considered the fourth patriarch of Israel? After all, he receives a double share of the inheritance through Manasseh and Ephraim, the two tribes who emanate from his loins - and it is he who saves his family, and thus the Jewish people, from starvation and oblivion.

Moreover, why does Moses emerge as the savior and redeemer of the Book of Exodus? What catapults this prince of Egypt to such an exalted position of Jewish leadership when he was raised in Pharaoh's palace, sports an Egyptian name (Moses means "son" in Egyptian) and seems totally disconnected from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

Let us begin with Moses. I believe it was the great Prof. Nechama Leibowitz, of blessed memory, who pointed out that Moses is the great fighter against injustice, whether it is perpetrated by Egyptian (gentile) against Hebrew (Exodus 2:11), by Hebrew against Hebrew, or by Midianite (gentile) against Midianite (gentile).

When we remember how G-d declares that He chose and loved Abraham because he would teach later generations to "keep G-d's way by doing acts of compassionate righteousness and moral justice," and how in this manner, "all the nations of the world will be blessed through him" (Genesis 18:18, 19), we realize that by fighting injustice in all three of these spheres Moses is expressing a direct line of continuity with Abraham, the first Hebrew and the recipient of G-d's covenant.

However, there is one category that is absent from Moses's list: an injustice performed by a Jew against a gentile. Clearly, the Bible understands the necessity of acting against injustice no matter what the ethnic profile of either oppressor or victim, since the source of Moses's commitment to strike out against injustice - in addition to whatever stories about Abraham he may have heard from his biological mother, Jochebed - was the example of his adoptive mother. This Egyptian princess flouted the cruel law of her father Pharaoh, risking her life, to save the Hebrew baby floating in an ark on the Nile River.

It is precisely this message of universality which the Bible expresses in the very first of Moses's acts against injustice, when he slays the Egyptian taskmaster beating the Hebrew: "...And he [Moses] saw

an Egyptian personage [ish] beating a Hebrew personage [ish] from amongst his [Moses's] brothers. And he looked at that one [the oppressor] and at the other one [the victim], and when he realized that there was no [real] personage [ish], he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand" (Ex. 2:11,12).

Rav Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin, famed dean of the Volozhin Yeshiva, explains that the Hebrew word "ish" is the highest category of the various Hebrew terms for "man." And, used to refer to both the Egyptian and the Hebrew, the word certainly conveys universal application. Moses was familiar with both Egyptian and Hebrew societies and recognized both the oppressor and the oppressed as having been important personages in their respective environments and communities.

But now that they had been thrust together as oppressor and victim, when Moses looked at each of them, he realized that each had lost his elevated status of "persona"; the very act of oppression demeans and demotes both perpetrator and sufferer, robs each of his status as having been created in the image of the Divine; there was longer an "ish" amongst them. And this would seem to be irrespective of who is the Egyptian and who is the Hebrew. © 2013 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

The Real Tears

This week, I ask you to explore a posuk with me that seem to contain both, superfluous and redundant words. The Jews were enslaved in Egypt under the evil King Pharaoh. The work was unbearable. They were miserable. And then, according to the posuk, it happened. "And it came to pass in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel cried out because of the toil, and they cried, and their cries went up unto Hashem because of the toil" (Exodus 2:23).

The King of Egypt dies, and then the Jews start to cry. Why then? Rashi comments in the name of one Midrash, that the King did not die, rather he was considered dead from a plague of tzoraas and was told to bathe in blood, procured by slaughtering Jewish babies.

But I'd like to take the text base approach. Why does the Torah specify why they cried? Why would they cry now? And why does the verse have to reiterate that "and their cries went up unto Hashem because of the toil"?

In the early 1900s, a simple religious Russian Jew decided that he could no longer stand the Czar's persecution. He would leave Russia to join his son who had settled in Houston, Texas, some twenty years earlier.

The son, who had totally assimilated and was a successful oil man, was thrown into a panic. "Of course,

you are welcome, Pa," he cabled, "I will arrange a visa, your tickets and fares. But you must realize that I have a wonderful reputation here as an oilman. When you arrive, you must adapt to the American culture or I will be destroyed.

Upon his arrival at the train station, the old man, dressed in his long coat and up-brimmed hat, was whisked to a haberdashery where he was fitted with the latest style fedora and a modern-cut suit. But still, his father looked too Jewish.

"Pa, it's not enough. I'll take you to the barber."

The first thing that came off was the beard. The dad began to whimper.

The son looked on and said, "It's alright Dad, you are becoming an American. You don't need it!" He held out a large grey Texas Stetson. "Look what I bought you!"

Then came the right curled sidelock. The barber moved the shaver, but the father put his hand up to stop him. His son yelled "Pa! You're a Texan now. The peyos, (sidelocks) they'll have to go."

The barber cut off the right peya. While the son looked on proudly, his Pa was becoming a real American. Then the left peya. And the old man began to weep.

"Why are you crying, Papa?" the son asked incredulously.

The father, resigned to his fate, simply answered sarcastically, "OK. I am crying because we lost the Alamo!"

The Jews in Egypt were probably never allowed to cry. Like the Nazis, who shot anyone who stopped to weep from pain or agony, the Egyptians surely beat them if they stopped to cry. But now, the King died. They had their chance. Everyone was crying. They would cry too!

The Torah testifies that not one tear was shed for Pharaoh. "Israel cried out because of the toil," and only because of the toil. And G-d knew it good and well, for when their cries went direct to Hashem, He knew that no one had suffered from Stockholm syndrome and identified with their captors. Indeed, "they cried, and their cries went up unto Hashem because of the toil" Only the toil and nothing else. © 2013 *Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Just before Moshe (Moses) sees the burning bush (sneh), the Torah tells us that he leads his flock to the farthest end (ahar) of the desert. (Exodus 3:1) Commentators offer different suggestions as to the meaning of ahar. Saadia Gaon (Babylonia, 10th C.) understands the text as denoting a specific spot-at the end of the desert-where the sneh was located. Hizkuni (R. Chizkia ben Manoach, Northern France, 13th C.) notes that ahar teaches us that Moshe took his flock

just beyond the desert, as it was there that he was able to find vegetation for his sheep.

While Saadia Gaon's and Hizkuni's comments teach us that ahar points to a physical place, Seforno (R. Ovadia Seforno, Italy, 16th C.) sees ahar as illustrating why Moshe was suitably prepared for the encounter with G-d. Moshe, goes far away, for only there could he properly meditate before encountering G-d.

But, it was left to the master commentary, Rashi (R. Shlomo ben Yitzhak, Northern France, 11th C.), to offer a different approach to the question of ahar. According to Rashi, Moshe took his flock beyond the desert (ahar) to graze. It was there, in no man's land, land owned by no one, that Moshe felt he had the right to graze his flock, knowing that his animals would steal from no one.

Interestingly, the word ahar appears in yet another moment of deep human meeting with G-d. When the angel of G-d tells Avraham (Abraham) not to sacrifice Yitzhak (Isaac), Avraham sees a ram caught in the thicket. There too, the Torah states in an unusual way, that the ram was -ahar. (Genesis 22:13) Perhaps the Torah uses the term ahar to again teach that the ram was "beyond" (ahar) in the sense that it belonged to no one. Being ownerless, Avraham felt he could take it and sacrifice it instead of Yitzhak.

An important message emerges from these incidents. One would imagine that in a moment of religious ecstasy, one could use whatever means at his/her disposal to rendezvous with G-d. After all, shouldn't one be able to expropriate property from anyone if it is needed in the worship of the Lord? The word ahar powerfully rejects this idea. The pathway to reaching out to G-d involves extreme sensitivity to our fellow person. In a deeply ecstatic spiritual moment, both Moshe and Avraham are careful not to connect with G-d by taking that which belonged to another.

Seforno's comment is important, as it teaches that encountering G-d requires spiritual preparation. Rashi's understanding goes further. Ahar teaches that the ultimate preparation in engaging G-d is how one acts towards another. As Rabbi Yisrael Salanter once said, on the road to worshipping G-d, one should be extremely careful not step on others along the way

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RABBI DANIEL TRAVIS

Integrity

“Yosef collected all the money in Egypt in payment for the food that people were buying. Yosef brought all the money to Pharaoh's treasury." (Bereshith 47:14) In order to highlight Yosef's honesty and reliability, the Torah describes the business practices Yosef employed when he was overseeing the

distribution of food in Egypt. (Ramban on Bereshith 47:14) During the years of famine, Yosef did not so much as taste a slice of bread each day until all those who had come to him for provisions had received their food. (Midrash cited in Ma'ayana Shel Torah p. 184) He also did not allow his hard work to justify taking money that did not belong to him. Since Pharaoh had placed his trust in Yosef, Yosef would not keep any of Pharaoh's money for himself; rather he bought all the money to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was well aware of Yosef's extraordinary honesty, and recognized that Yosef would not take anything at all that was not rightfully his. When Yaakov and his family came down to Egypt to live, Pharaoh knew that Yosef would not take property without his consent. Only after Pharaoh had explicitly commanded him to do so, did Yosef appropriate land for his family in Egypt. (Bereshith 45:19)

Yosef was rewarded during his lifetime for his integrity. "If you see a man who is diligent in his work -- he shall stand before kings." (Mishlei 22:29) This verse applies to Yosef, who worked faithfully for his master Potiphar. Because of his faithful service, G-d arranged events so that Pharaoh himself freed Yosef from his captivity, (Bereshith 41:14) and appointed him Prime Minister of Egypt. (Shir HaShirim Rabbah 1:1)

Yosef's integrity continued to bring him respect even after his death. When his remains were brought through the wilderness, his coffin was carried alongside the Ark of the Covenant containing the tablets upon which the Ten Commandments were inscribed. When asked what Yosef had done to deserve such great honor, Moshe Rabbeinu replied, "This person [Yosef] fulfilled that which is contained in this Ark [i.e., 'You shall not steal'], as the verse states, 'Yosef brought all the money to Pharaoh's treasury.'" (Mechilta, beginning of Parshath Beshalach) ©2013 Rabbi D. Travis and torah.org

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg

Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne

The sages interpret the name "Di Zahav" in the beginning of the book of Devarim as a reference to the sin of the Golden Calf. They described a parable of a man who had a son. He washed him, anointed him with oils, fed him, and gave him to drink. He then tied a bag with money around his neck and sent him to the entrance of a whorehouse. Could this son avoid sin? That is how Moshe defended Bnei Yisrael. He said: You gave them an abundance of gold, until they were satiated. Why is it surprising that they made a calf?

Rabbi Soloveitchik found this difficult to understand. While it is true that the story has elements in common with what really happened, it is basically illusionary. What father would ever do this to his own

son? The rabbi replied that just like Egypt, which was the height of civilization at the time of the exile, so all of the places where Bnei Yisrael were sent to exile were considered the most sophisticated cultures of their times. This includes Babylon, Greece, and Rome (and perhaps Germany in our generation), which were all at the highest levels of culture, technology, and science when they conquered the people of Yisrael. Why did G-d specifically choose to send Bnei Yisrael in exile to these places? The answer is that this was meant to oppose any possible suggestion that just as the Jews have the Torah the other nations have just laws and regulations, culture, and behavior patterns of their own. The Holy One, Blessed be He, therefore sent us into the most civilized centers, so that we would be able to compare the Torah and the culture of the other nations from our own experience.

Based on this approach, Rabbi Soloveitchik was able to explain a verse from this week's Torah portion. "And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man from among his brothers. So he turned to and fro and saw that there was no man, and he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." [Shemot 2:11-12]. It is interesting to note that at first we are told that Moshe saw "an Egyptian man," but in the end he struck "the Egyptian" - without the title "man." At first Moshe thought that the Egyptian was a man, somebody who was important and learned. But when he saw how ruthlessly he struck the Jew, he was troubled about his humanity. "He turned to and from and saw that there was no man" - Moshe realized that this was not a man but a two-legged beast who strikes others and pushes them around, and therefore, "he struck the Egyptian" - without the title "man."

This is similar to what Malbim wrote with respect to the verse, "I said that there is just no fear of G-d in this place, and they will kill me because of my wife" [Bereishit 20:11]:

"He [Avraham] told him that even if he or his nation appeared to be great philosophers and that they had written upright laws and acted in good ways and followed justice and the law according to their intellect - Avraham could not be sure that their intellect would prevail when lust moved such a man or nation to perform an evil act. The opposite was true. At a time when they would have a fiery lust for another man's wife or his fortune without any witnesses, then the intellect would also follow the inclination to murder and adultery and all kinds of evil. There is only one force in the soul of man that we can trust not to sin, and that is the trait of fear that is planted in the soul."

It is remarkable to see these thoughts that Malbim wrote before the Nazis came to power in Germany. "You chose us from among the nations" (the primitive ones) "and lifted us up from all the other peoples" (who are cultured). [Shabbat Mincha prayer].
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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

Pharaoh was desperate to prevent the possibility of the Children of Israel having a leader who could take a stand against Egyptian authority, who could save them from being taken advantage of. This was why he called a meeting of his inner cabinet (see Rashi on Sh'mos 1:10), why he asked the midwives to kill every son born to the Hebrews (see Rashi on 1:16), and why he had the newborn sons tossed into the Nile (see Rashi on 1:22). How ironic is it that the leader he tried so hard to eliminate was raised in Pharaoh's own home (2:10)! Although it is certainly true that with G-d being intimately involved in taking the Children of Israel out of Egypt anything is possible, it is difficult to understand how Pharaoh could have allowed this to happen. If he went to such great lengths to ensure that such a child wouldn't survive, how did he rationalize letting Moshe live? How could he explain to everyone that although every other male born to the Hebrews had to be killed, the one being raised by his daughter was exempt?

Some (see Torah Sh'laima 2:69) suggest that Bisya (Pharaoh's daughter) pretended that Moshe was her natural son, so no one knew that it was a Hebrew growing up in the palace. This is hard to accept, for several reasons. Although there would have been enough time between Moshe's rescue from the Nile and his being weaned by his real mother for Bisya to claim that she was pregnant, Moshe was no longer an infant when he was brought to her (Sh'mos Rabbah 1:26 says he was two years old); how could she pass off a toddler as a newborn? Did all of the handmaidens who accompanied her to the Nile keep her secret? Was she able to fool everyone in the palace, even those who attended to all of her needs? To whom did she "say" that she named him Moshe because she drew him from the water (2:10)? There is no indication that Bisya was ever punished by her father for misleading him and saving a Hebrew child, and all signs (except for Pharaoh allowing Moshe to be raised in his palace) point to it being known that Moshe was a Hebrew. How was this tolerated?

A similar issue comes up when Moshe returns to Egypt to end the slavery; how does Pharaoh allow Moshe (and Aharon) to come and go as they please? Even if the Tribe of Levi was never enslaved, Moshe should have been arrested (or worse) for threatening the king and for bringing destruction to the Egyptians. Yet, until the last plague, he could travel with impunity and could speak to Pharaoh whenever he wanted. Does this seem reasonable?

Egypt had a very advanced civilization, even if it had some primitive aspects (by our standards) as well (i.e. idol worship). Although ruled by Pharaoh, he fancied himself as more of a deity than a tyrant (see Y'chezkel 29:3). We see evidence of this not just in

Moshe and Aharon's ability to approach him whenever they wanted (rather than being locked up and executed); when the Children of Israel believed they were being wronged, they took their grievance directly to Pharaoh (5:15), which would be unheard of under tyrannical rule. When Pharaoh wanted to have all the male infants killed, he didn't simply decree that they be slaughtered, but attempted to do so in a way that no one would realize what was happening (by having the midwives kill them at birth). After the midwives refused to cooperate, they weren't jailed or executed either. (Perhaps this is why Pharaoh had to come up with a "wise" scheme to subjugate the new Hebrew nation, as just making harsh decrees does not befit a ruler and nation that consider themselves to be advanced.)

If so, How did Pharaoh get away with decreeing that babies should be tossed into the Nile? Bearing in mind that the Nile was also considered an Egyptian deity (see Rashi on 7:17), it is possible that the decree was not to kill the infants by drowning them in the river, but to place their fate in the hands of the Nile-god (a suggestion made by Rabbi Ari Kahn, see <http://www.aish.com/tp/i/moha/48910062.html>). If this god thought the child was worthy of living, it would sustain it (as it sustained the entire Egyptian nation). If, however, the Nile-god determined that the child should not live, it allowed it to drown. This concept could have been accepted by the Egyptian populous to the extent that, for a short time (when the astrologers said that the future redeemer of the Hebrew nation would be born, see Rashi on 4:22) even Egyptian babies were given over to the Nile-god to determine whether or not they should live.

Unfortunately, almost no infants passed the Nile litmus test. There was one child, though, who did. He was therefore given a name that indicated so: "And she called him Moshe, and she said, for from the water I have drawn him" (2:10). Here we have an infant who gets the approval of the Nile-god, was discovered by the daughter of the Pharaoh-god, and was brought up in the ruler/deity's home. For this reason, Moshe himself may have been revered as a semi-deity. Not only that, but Moshe "grew in a manner unlike anyone else in all of the land" (Sh'mos Rabbah 1:26, see also 1:27). When he was five, he looked like he was eleven (Tanchuma Yashon, Va'eira 17). He was such a handsome child that everyone wanted to gaze upon him, and couldn't bring themselves to leave his presence (Sh'mos Rabbah 1:26). He was extremely strong (Nedarim 38a), with his strength (at 18 years of age) compared to the strength of a lion (Yalkut Shimoni 118). Even if we don't take the Talmud (B'rachos 54b) saying he was 10 cubits tall literally, he was certainly much taller than everyone else, with his height being compared to the height of a cedar tree (Yalkut Shimoni 118). He was a rare physical specimen, whose appearance-both in stature and in beauty-was consistent with the mythology that made him into a human deity. Pharaoh himself was quite fond

of the child, constantly hugging and kissing him (Sh'mos Rabbah 1:26), so was likely blinded to the extent that he couldn't consider killing him. Even if he had wanted to, would anyone have let Pharaoh execute this child-deity? Could he risk having everyone turn on him for killing one of their deities? Would his own status as a deity, including the reverence he expected everyone to treat him with, be impugned if he treated a fellow deity that way? If, based on his being spared by the Nile-god and raised by the Pharaoh-god's daughter in the Pharaoh-god's home, and supported by his seemingly super-human physical attributes, Moshe was considered a deity, we can more easily understand how Pharaoh couldn't execute the Hebrew that his daughter was raising. Besides, after claiming that throwing infants into the Nile was not murder but a test to see who the Nile-god thinks should live, how could Pharaoh kill the one child who passed the test?!

Eventually, when Moshe defended his fellow Hebrew and smote the Egyptian taskmaster, Pharaoh realized his "mistake," and tried to kill him. Whether he tried to do so surreptitiously due to Moshe's perceived status as a deity is unclear, but a miraculous escape from Pharaoh's sword would only add to Moshe's supernatural reputation. Considering that the wild, ferocious animals protecting Pharaoh's palace became tame whenever Moshe (and Aharon) arrived at the palace (see Yalkut Shimoni 176 and 181), the perception that Moshe was a deity-and either untouchable or unacceptable to be confronted-likely grew even more. Therefore, not only couldn't the Pharaoh who raised him consider getting rid of a young Moshe, but the Pharaoh who suffered through the plagues couldn't try to dispose of the adult Moshe either. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI DAVID LAPIN

Future Learning

Professionals and business people the opportunity to acquire true learning skills and master the technology of Talmudic learning. We need to develop new world-views and imbibe Torah thought and values into the very core of their identities.

Educational method has been disrupted. The way we learn will in the future will not be a linear continuation from the past. The quick, free and global diffusion of information that the Internet provides has revolutionized how young people learn.

Students, accessing information on line, no longer need teachers for this. Models like the Flipped Classroom (<http://www.techsmith.com/flipped-classroom.html>) and The Khan Academy (<http://www.khanacademy.org>) recognize that education needs reinvention. But we don't always have to reinvent in order to plot a more relevant future. Sometimes we can rediscover. Sometimes by going back to the genesis of an idea we can discover the code that maps

out its future just as a particle of a newborn baby's DNA informs the child's development. To discover the Torah's model of education, a model that is modern and relevant now more than ever, we need to go back to the very genesis of Jewish education.

Avraham was the genesis of Jewish learning. Although Adam also had access to knowledge, he was born with knowledge and transmitted it as information. Avraham, on the other hand, innovated. He discovered knowledge that was not given to him and to which no one else in his time had access. He innovatively articulated it and packaged it into a livable formula that he taught to his disciples (The meaning of *vayishmor mishmarti* -- see *Bereishis Rabba* 95:3). He gave his method, the 'technology' of *chidush* (innovation), over to his son who in turn taught it to Jacob, and he to his twelve sons. So the study of Torah was core to Jewish life long before it was given to us at Sinai. So much so that before Yaacov began his journey to Egypt, he sent his son Yehuda as an advance guard to establish a Beis Talmud, a fixed center for the study of Torah there (Rashi, *Bereishis* 46:28)

What was Avraham's technology of *Chidush* considering he had no text and no teacher? The Midrash on Parshas Vayigash (*Rabba* 95:3) describes it: "And where did Avraham learn Torah from? Rabban Shimon says he two kidneys became as two decanters of water and they sprang forth Torah. Rabbi Levi says he reasoned it out himself... Avraham observed the details of Torah and taught it to his sons."

The views in this Midrash are not dissenting ones; they are complementary opinions that highlight three dimensions of learning. The first is an intuitive method, the second is rational and the third is a didactic method. All three methods are necessary in order to imbibe Torah and absorb it into the very DNA of ones being. Only by using all three methods does the knowledge of Torah convert into insight and wisdom providing new perspectives and a Divine perception of the world and life. The general world of education, recognizing that information is not wisdom, has already begun to slowly revolutionize its methodology. Sadly, at the same time many people and groups learning Torah have devolved their methods from three-dimensional Abrahamic learning, to one dimensional, linear, secular methodology.

Consider the number of people whose learning is limited to either passively listening to an informative shiur, often the *daf yomi* (daily *daf* of Talmud), or to reading Talmudic texts from one of the translations and anthologies of classical commentators. The pace and passivity of the process does not allow for the intuitive exploration and discovery of ideas, instead ideas are generically packaged and presented as if they are the only way to understand the text. There is little or no innovation. Teachers all use the same anthologies as their primary source, and students of classes anywhere in the world get the same prepackaged material.

There is little opportunity for students to apply their rational intellects to the material they are studying and probe their teachers deeply as they deconstruct and reconstruct the logic of the Talmud, making it their own in the process.

In Yeshiva, even after twenty hours on one *daf* (double-sided page), it was only when we taught that *daf* to a more junior student or presented a *chabura* (academic paper) to our class that we really grasped the section of learning and made it part of our beings. We studied Torah the Abrahamic way! What chance have those Torah students today who substitute being informed for being inspired and information for insight?

I do not, for a moment, trivialize the enormous contribution made to advancing Torah literacy by the *daf yomi* movement and the spectacular publications that have opened the Talmud to the masses. I suggest only that substituting information gathering for real three-dimensional learning in which intuition, intellect and teaching converge into wisdom, is a poor alternative to real learning.

Professionals and business people deserve more than places and opportunities to learn Torah together and to participate in informational shiurim. They also need the opportunity to acquire true learning skills and master the technology of Talmudic learning. We need to give them places where over years of consistent study they will develop new world-views and imbibe Torah thought and values into the very core of their identities. We need to open their intuitive minds to Torah and stretch their rational minds in the deep exploration of new ideas. We need to prepare them to teach others so that they themselves can reach the highest levels of understanding. Then we will raise a generation of professionals who are also *talmidei chachamim*, and more importantly, individuals who are professional *talmidei chachamim*.

Give yourself an eternal gift. In addition to any informational learning you currently do, find yourself a true Rav, an educator. Find yourself a teacher who stretches your mind, ignites your soul and inspires you to action; one who propels you into spiritual spaces you could never have found without him. © 2013 Rabbi D. Lapin

