

Torah Tidbits

ISSUE 1643

JAN. 10TH 2026
כ"א טבת תשפ"ו

פרשת שמות
PARSHAT SHEMOT



Shovavim: Remove Your Shoes
Rabbi Judah Mischel
Page 44



**From Pain to Peoplehood:
Growing into Nationhood**
Jen Airley Page 84

ארץ זבת חלב ודבש
שמות ג':י"ז

ישראל

YERUSHALAYIM SHABBAT SHEMOT ZMANIM

CANDLES 4:16 PM • HAVDALA 5:33 PM • RABBEINU TAM 6:04 PM



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Torah Tidbits is proud to share a photo each week on the cover from our readers!

It is an honor to showcase the immense talent from across the country.

Send us your best photos and give us the opportunity to highlight your story.

Everyone is invited to submit!

Please email to aarong@ouisrael.org



COVER PHOTO Photographed by Sara Heiney and Tamar Goldstein

This photo symbolizes the beautiful colors and fruits here in Eretz Yisrael. Walking around Eretz Yisrael, there are so many sights and moments that I wished I could bring my friends and family to see. Moments I wanted to save and share. That I wanted to freeze. Inspirational moments that touched my heart. Finding new elements that were culturally infused. I had my camera on the streets with me and, all of a sudden, I was able to share these moments with the world. I was able to snap my perspective and show it to others. I would go on walks and snap special Israeli moments like the bustle of Erev Shabbos shopping at Geula or a little chasidische boy davening at Kever Rochel. The more I captured, the more I saw in this land steeped in Torah and beauty.



We continue to pray for the return Ran Gvili, last of the Kedoshim held in Gaza



CANDLE LIGHTING AND HAVDALA TIMES



OTHER Z'MANIM



JERUSALEM

Ranges 11 days Wednesday - Shabbat
Jan. 7 - 17 / 18 - 28 Tevet

Earliest Tallit and Tefillin	5:45
Sunrise	6:40-6:39
Sof Zman Kriat Shema	9:12-9:14
Magen Avraham	8:34-8:36
Sof Zman Tefila	10:03-10:05
(According to the Gra and Baal HaTanaya)	
Chatzot (Halachic Noon)	11:45-11:49
Mincha Gedola (Earliest Mincha)	12:15-12:19
Plag Mincha	3:47-3:54
Sunset (Including Elevation)	4:55-5:03



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	Shemot		Vaera	
	Candles	Havdala	Candles	Havdala
Yerushalayim/Maale Adumim	4:16	5:33	4:22	5:39
Aza Area (Netivot, Sderot et al)	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Beit Shemesh/RBS	4:35	5:34	4:41	5:40
Gush Etzion	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:39
Raanana/Tel Mond/Herzliya/K.Saba	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:40
Modiin/Chashmonaim	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:39
Netanya	4:32	5:34	4:38	5:39
Be'er Sheva	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:41
Rehovot	4:33	5:35	4:40	5:40
Petach Tikva	4:16	5:34	4:22	5:40
Ginot Shomron	4:32	5:33	4:38	5:39
Haifa / Zichron	4:21	5:32	4:27	5:38
Gush Shiloh	4:31	5:32	4:37	5:38
Tel Aviv / Givat Shmuel	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:40
Givat Ze'ev	4:36	5:33	4:42	5:39
Chevron / Kiryat Arba	4:33	5:34	4:39	5:40
Ashkelon	4:35	5:36	4:41	5:42
Yad Binyamin	4:34	5:35	4:40	5:40
Tzfat / Bikat HaYarden	4:23	5:30	4:29	5:36
Golan	4:28	5:30	4:35	5:36
Nahariya/Maalot	4:29	5:31	4:35	5:37
Afula	4:30	5:31	4:36	5:37

Rabbeinu Tam (Jerusalem): Shemot - 6:10 PM • Vaera - 6:16 PM

All Times According to MyZmanim (20 mins before Sunset in most Cities;
40 mins in Yerushalayim and Petach Tikva; 30 mins in Tzfat and Haifa)

Daf Yomi: Zevachim 118



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DEAR TORAH TIDBITS FAMILY

RABBI AVI BERMAN
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There are certain words that can sound harmless, but they reveal something much deeper about how we see ourselves. Not because anyone is trying to make a statement, but because language has a way of showing what sits quietly in the heart.

One word that still makes me pause is when Jews refer to Yerushalayim as “Jerusalem.” I understand why people do it. English has its habits. But if this is the beating heart of our people, if Tanach itself calls it Yerushalayim, why would we give it a different name when we speak about it with love and longing?

And it is not only a name. It carries meaning. *Yeru* points to *yirah*, to awe of Hashem, and *Shalem* points to wholeness and peace. It reminds us what Yerushalayim stands for and what our lives are meant to strive toward. So it puzzles me when even very religious Jews, people who feel a deep connection to the

city, casually switch it into its English form. Especially because we do not do this across the board. Most people do not say “Hebron” when they are speaking about Chevron, or “Nablus” when they mean Shechem, or “Tiberias” when they are talking about Tiviera. But Yerushalayim becomes “Jerusalem,” more often than not. If you look back at my columns, you will see that I have always used Yerushalayim. For me it has always been about the principle. The way we speak says something about what we value.

That same idea comes up in another word I hear Jews use all the time, and I say this with a great deal of love and respect for Jews living all over the world. As part of my job, I have the privilege of meeting Jews from many backgrounds, in Israel and across the Diaspora. I speak to people at OU events and at synagogues and conferences, in communities large and small. I have extremely close friends and family living in Vancouver, Miami, New York, Toronto, Los Angeles, and many other places. Beautiful families, sincere Jews, devoted communities.

But I still find myself uncomfortable when I hear Jews refer to their “home” as America, Canada, or anywhere else outside the Land of Israel. I know and recognize that more than half of the Jewish people live outside the Land of Israel. There are many legitimate reasons that bring people there, and many legitimate reasons that keep them there. This is not about judging anyone’s situation.

It is about what the word “home” implies.



OU Israel mourns the passing of

Rabbi Julius Berman zt”l

Former President of the Orthodox Union,
Chairman of the OU Kashrus Commission,
Founding Chairman of OU Press,
and one of the most significant lay leaders
of twentieth century Orthodox Jewish Life.

May his entire family
be comforted among those who
mourn for Tzion and Yerushalayim.

When someone says “home,” it usually means more than where they have a house. It means “this is where I belong.”

It is one thing to talk about where your job is, where your family is, where you have built a life, where you hang your hat. But “home” is a different word. When my friends come to Israel, I make a point of sending them a message that says, “Welcome home.” I write it to remind them that while they may have a temporary home outside of Israel right now, and they may indeed have a beautiful house and community, the Land of Israel is where we truly belong and where we will all end up.

We also see how this Land blossoms when its children come home. In the nineteenth century, Mark Twain famously described the Land of Israel as barren and desolate. Today, anyone with eyes can see the blessing around us. As the Jewish people return, the fruit trees grow, the roads expand, the fields blossom, and the Land itself seems to respond. Baruch Hashem, there is a clear sense that when Am Yisrael comes home, the Land comes alive.

All of this has always lived inside me as a feeling, but this week’s parsha helped me see it even more clearly through the words of Chazal. At the end of Sefer Bereishit, Yosef makes his brothers take an oath. He tells them that Hashem will surely remember them, and when that day comes they must carry his bones up from Egypt and bring him to the Land of Israel (Bereshit 50:25). Yosef’s final request is not about honor. It is about belonging. He wants his resting place to reflect who he is and where he truly connects.

Hundreds of years later, Moshe Rabbeinu



fulfills Yosef’s wish. Chazal describe how Moshe searches for Yosef’s remains and ensures that they are taken out with the people. *Bnei Yisrael* carry Yosef with them through the *Midbar* and ultimately bury him in Shechem 40 years later.

And that brings up a painful question that many people have asked. Moshe Rabbeinu was just days from entering the Land of Israel. How could it be that Yosef merited burial in the Land, and Moshe did not?

One answer that is often given is that Moshe was buried outside the Land so

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our dear brother**

Dr. Mark Weiner ז"ל

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Upon their yahrzeits

**By the Weiner, Miller,
Solomont, & Saar families**

that no one would know the location of his grave, and it would not become an object of worship. I understand the idea behind that answer, but it never fully sat well with me. If the concern was a known location, Moshe could have been buried in the Land in a place that would remain hidden.

Several years ago, I came across a passage in Midrash Rabbah that helped me understand this in a way that felt true and piercing. The Midrash compares two descriptions. When Yosef flees from the wife of Potiphar, she describes him as an *ish ivri*, a Hebrew man (Bereshit 39:14). But in this week's parsha, when Moshe saves the daughters of Yitro, they describe him as an *ish mitzri*, an Egyptian man (Shemot 2:19). The Midrash says that this difference helps explain why Moshe did not merit to be buried in the Land of Israel.

Think about that. Moshe Rabbeinu, the man who spoke with Hashem, the redeemer of Israel, the teacher of Torah, is described as an Egyptian man. Not because he was actually Egyptian, but because that is how he was perceived, and in some way how he allowed himself to be framed. Yosef, even in Egypt, is seen as an *ish ivri*. Yosef carries

his identity openly. His sense of self is tied to his people and to his homeland even while living in exile.

The Midrash is not trying to reduce Moshe's greatness. *Chas v'shalom*. But it is teaching a principle that is both subtle and powerful. Identity is not only what we feel. It is also what we project. It is how we speak. It is how we carry ourselves. It is the language we use to describe where we belong.

When I read that Midrash, it gave me *chizuk* for something I have always felt. As Jews, whether we are currently living in the Five Towns or Omaha, whether we are living in Australia or England, our desire, our heart, our connection should be to our homeland, to the Land of Israel.

Again, there are many legitimate reasons to be living outside of Israel. Life is complex. People have responsibilities, families, work, health, parents, children. But the question is not only where we live. The question is how we relate to ourselves.

Do we speak about ourselves in a way that sounds settled in exile, as if this is where we belong forever, as if this is the final address? Or do we speak with a sense of longing and direction, even if the timeline is not yet clear?

If a Jew can say, "Right now I am living in New York, or Florida, or London, but my home is Eretz Yisrael, and be'ezrat Hashem I hope to return," then that Jew is living with the identity of an *ish ivri*. Even while outside the Land, they carry themselves as someone who belongs to their people and to their homeland.

And I believe that Hashem sees that. When we speak with that attachment, when we keep the language of belonging alive, we strengthen the spiritual connection between

May the learning
from this issue of Torah Tidbits
serve as an **נשמה טהורה עליו** for the
of our dear mother

יכבד ע"ה בת הרב אלימלך זצ"ל
Judith Ehrenberg ע"ה
on her 60th **yahrzeit**

היתה בת חמישים ביום י"ט טבת, תשכ"ו

תנצ"ה

ד"ר משה ואסתר ארנברג

Am Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael. We remind ourselves, our children, and our communities that we are not only residents of wherever we live. We are בני הארץ. We are a people whose story is anchored in this Land.

This is also what OU Israel is here for. To help more Jews feel connected to their home, to help more Jews come home, and to help English speakers living here build lives of Torah, community, and belonging. We run programs across the country with an incredible staff, from Torah Initiatives to the Women's Division, from NCSY to Yachad to JLIC, and many other programs that bring Torah, chesed, and connection into the lives of thousands. Through Torah Tidbits each week, and through so much on-the-ground work, we try to strengthen the relationship between Jews and the Land of Israel, and

between Jews and their own identity.

We will continue investing, raising funds, and expanding our programming for English speakers across the country, because this is our home. And we look forward not only to hearing Jews speak about Israel as home, but to seeing more and more Jews take the steps to actually make Israel their home.

Be'ezrat Hashem, we look forward to seeing you at OU Israel programming, and we look forward to the day when the words we use reflect the reality we are building.

Wishing you all an uplifting and inspiring Shabbat,



Rabbi Avi Berman
Executive Director, OU Israel
aberman@ouisrael.org

The unveiling for Rabbi Moshe Hauer זצ"ל



Will be on Friday,
January 9th (20 Tevet)
at 9:30AM
Har HaMenuchot,
Gush: Mem
Chelka: Zayin
Row: Tet

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and the OU Family**

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RABBI MOSHE HAUER ZT"L

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Overcoming the Great Conspiracy Theory of Antisemitism

Antisemitism has never been just about physical attacks on Jews. It is the great conspiracy theory, in which a narrative is generated about the Jewish people portraying us as all-powerful and utterly disloyal, a combination of factors that create a climate of hatred and resentment towards us. Demonization creates space for physical attack.

This is the original story of antisemitism described in our parsha. The Jewish people were originally welcomed to Egypt as heroes, the family of the viceroy who had saved the country from ruin, yet all the good and the benefit they had brought to Egypt and its rulers was quickly forgotten. A new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef and who began to portray the Jewish people as all powerful and utterly disloyal (Shemot 1:8-10):

“Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we are. Let us deal shrewdly with them lest they increase and when a war befalls us, they will

join our enemies and wage war against us and depart from the land.”

This was a critical stage in the process of our Egyptian experience, the demonization of the Jews. Before a taskmaster had cracked his whip or thrown a Jewish baby in the Nile, a narrative had to be constructed to recast the Jews as the Egyptians’ oppressors.

This is why the Pesach Haggadah cites the above verse to illustrate that which is written in the book of Devarim (26:6), *Vayarei’u otanu haMitzrim vayanunu vayitnu aleinu avoda kasha*, “the Egyptians made us bad and afflicted us, and they burdened us with hard work.” Notice that the first phrase does not say that they did bad to us, but *vayarei’u otanu*, they made us out to be bad. This recharacterization of the Jews is illustrated in the verse from our parsha cited above that does not describe the Egyptians doing bad to us but rather their creating a picture of how we were not friend but foe, scheming against them and awaiting the opportunity to actively turn on them (see commentaries of *Orchot Chaim* and *Rashbatz* on the Haggadah).

We can readily imagine how disorienting this must have been for our ancestors. One of their own had saved Egypt and transformed

Condolences to the family of
Howie Berg z”l
on his passing

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים

its economy to Pharaoh's favor, and now they were suddenly recast as the enemy. Their contributions to Egyptian society had been consigned to the dustbins of history and they were quickly transformed from savior to oppressor.

Their first reaction must have been to blame it on the particular Pharaoh, the person then sitting in the seat of leadership. "Once we are rid of him, things will certainly be better." As Ramban wrote (2:23), "The custom of all subjects of a wicked tyrant is to hope for and look forward to the day of his death." Heads will roll, we will sack the coach or the university president and all will be good again. But when they saw that the king had died and nothing improved, they realized that conspiracy theories stubbornly survive and do not disappear from society with a change of leadership.

What can possibly come next that can bode well for us? Is the only path forward one of doom, Heaven forbid? Is the painful history of Jewish exile necessarily repeating itself?

Our Torah history provides three better pathways forward. In Moshe's Egypt, relief for the Jews came only with the tragic collapse of Egypt. In Yosef's case, he benefited from Pharaoh's responsiveness to the fear of Egypt's potential imminent collapse. And in the story of Purim, Achashverosh simply awoke one night to reopen the history books and read the true story of the Jewish contribution to society, thus resetting the narrative about the Jews.

This Shabbat, like every Shabbat, all of us will appeal to God for the well-being of our country and its government. We sincerely pray that the American kingdom of kindness will survive its current challenges and that it will recognize and be responsive to the

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genuine threats to its future, awakening itself to reread the true story of America and of the Jewish people, fundamentally resetting the narrative to "place in the hearts of all Americans to deal kindly with us and all Israel. In their days and in ours may the Jews be saved and Israel dwell in safety, and may the Redeemer come to Zion. *Kein yehi ratzon.*"

"Now it came to pass in those many days that the king of Egypt died, and the children of Israel sighed from the labor, and they cried out, and their cry ascended to God from the labor. God heard their cry, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob." (Shemot 2:23) ■

**Condolences to Gidon Ariel
on the passing of his BROTHER z"l**
המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים



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PARSHAT SHEMOT

The Jewish people are in Egypt. A new Paro is concerned with the size of the Jewish people. He decrees hard labor, infanticide and then actively drowning the male babies. Moshe is born, raised in Paro's daughter's home. After seeing the Jews mistreated, Moshe flees to Midian, marries and settles there. At age 80, Moshe encounters the burning bush. G-d instructs him to go to Paro and demand, in G-d's name, to free the Jewish people. Moshe, after attempting to refuse this mission, goes to Paro. Paro increases the burdens. The people complain.



1ST ALIYA (1:1-17)

70 Bnei Yisrael descend to Egypt. They grow exceedingly numerous, filling the land. A new king who knew not Yosef arises. Afraid that the Jews would join with enemies of Egypt, he seeks to weaken their numbers. A labor tax is followed by oppressive labor. Then the midwives are instructed to kill the Jewish babies. The midwives fear G-d and do not heed Paro's directive.

The book of Shemot, of Exodus is a contrast to the book of Bereshit.

Bereshit was the story of people, our patriarchs and matriachs; Shemot is the story of the nation. Bereshit takes place in the Land of Israel; Shemot, in Egypt. Bereshit is the story of the covenant to inherit the Land of Israel; Shemot, the exodus from Egypt.

But while the Torah is an account of our

people and our history, it is more importantly the encounter of G-d and man. And this encounter of G-d and man is entirely different in Bereshit than it is in Shemot.

In Bereshit, G-d hovers, lurks, while the people play out their lives. He promises the Land to Avraham and his children, then seems to leave the people to figure out how to make that happen. He promises but doesn't control. The promises are the backdrop to the machinations of man.

In Shemot, G-d controls. He is the Main Director, the Jewish people the mere stage actors. He no longer lurks, with repeated promises. He acts, dominates, controls, manipulates. He initiates, communicates, commands. Later, at Sinai, He reveals Himself.

Shemot is the story of Divine control of Jewish destiny.

But His appearance begins only when we hit bottom. We have to wait until that Divine control appears. Until then, He appears to be absent.

Paro acts to weaken the Jewish people. Vicious actions, including murder. The midwives fear G-d, refuse to murder. Where is He? Our people are being murdered. Where is He? There is no mention of G-d's actions.

We have seen this before. G-d's name is absent from the sale of Yosef, as it is here. Yosef is sold, becomes a slave, then a prisoner. Where is He? Why doesn't He save Yosef?

It is as if He restrains Himself, allowing us to spiral downward all on our own. Man does

a mighty fine job of cruelty all on his own. The Divine restrains Himself, allowing man to be cruel. He will appear when we hit bottom.



2ND ALIYA (1:18-2:10)

The midwives defend their actions to Paro. Paro commands all Jewish baby boys to be thrown into the river. Moshe is born, placed in the water in a basket. Paro's daughter rescues him. Miriam arranges for Moshe's mother to nurse him. He is returned to Paro's daughter and named Moshe.

The story of Moshe's rescue is in stark contrast to Yosef's sale. Yosef is thrown by his brothers into a dry pit that had no water; Moshe is thrown into the water by his mother but remains dry. Yosef's brothers move away from the pit; Moshe's sister stays close to see what happens. Yosef's brothers didn't respond to his cry; Paro's daughter hears Moshe's cry. Yosef's brothers do not bring him home to his father; Moshe's sister brings Moshe home to nurse with his mother. Parallel stories; radically different.



3RD ALIYA (2:11-25)

Moshe matures. He goes out to see the travails of his brothers. He defends a Jew by killing his Egyptian aggressor, and then saves a Jew from a Jewish aggressor. He flees for his life to Midian, aids Yitro's daughters, is welcomed by Yitro, marries Zipporah, has a child, Gershom. "For I am a stranger in a strange land". G-d sees the suffering of the Jews and remembers His covenant.

The reversal of the sin of the brothers continues: the brothers did not see the suffering of their brother while Moshe wants to see and relieve the pain of his brothers. Moshe names his son Gershom, for "I am a stranger",

while Yosef names his son Menashe, as he has forgotten his father's home.

And then, when the suffering is so oppressive everything changes.

G-d appears. His name appears 5 times in 3 verses. Now, everything is different.



4TH ALIYA (3:1-15)

Moshe and the burning bush. Moshe, Moshe, Hineni. G-d speaks, Moshe cowers. G-d tells him: I have seen the suffering of My people. I will save them from Egypt and bring them to the Land of milk and honey. I am sending you to go to Paro and he will release My people from Egypt. Moshe objects: who am I to go to Paro? And the Jewish people will question who sent me. G-d says: tell them the G-d of their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov sent you.

The entire story of the Torah changes here. G-d moves from the unseen force behind human action to directly dictating human activity. He tells Moshe that He will take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to the Land of Israel.

Up until now, the Jewish people have been promised the Land but have lived only with the promise, not with its fulfillment. They have not seen the Hand of G-d but have rather detected it behind the events. As Yosef said "G-d has brought me to Egypt to save the family." He never heard that. He surmised that being in Egypt to save his family is just too bizarre a twist of events; it must be Divinely driven. But he doesn't know that; he figures it must be.

Now the veil is drawn. Moshe is told in vivid detail exactly what will transpire. The Jews will be sent out by Paro. The story of the Exodus from Egypt is a pillar of Jewish belief because it is a blatant, direct display of

G-d's Hand in our history. It is His Hand in full display, not behind the veil.



5TH ALIYA (3:16-4:17)

G-d continues: Gather the people. Tell them that I will take them to the Land. They will listen. Go to Paro. I know he will not listen. I will smite the Egyptians. You will be loaded with gold, silver and clothing from the Egyptians. Moshe is still convinced that the people will not believe him. G-d gives him signs: staff turns to snake and then back, hand turns leprous and then back. And water to blood. Moshe objects: I am not a good speaker. G-d says: I give speech to man. I will send Aharon with you. He will speak. Take your staff.

Moshe's reluctance is striking. The exchange at the burning bush covers 2 aliyot, a total of 39 verses. That is a lot. And it is because Moshe doesn't want to do what he is told to do.

Avraham did not demur from a pretty rough command to sacrifice his son. Noah didn't either when given a command that would bring derision. Moshe is a very begrudging leader.

But that itself is instructive. Moshe is not a man driven by a mission, a great, charismatic leader who leads his people from oppression

to freedom, displaying the power of human will in the face of injustice. And after all, he is 80, a rather late start on leading his people.

The charismatic leader leading his people from slavery to freedom would be a great story. But it is not our story. Our story is of the Divine Hand guiding human events through a reluctant leader.

This is not Moshe's story. It is the Divine's. And even that great refrain "let my people go" is used inaccurately. It is not the charismatic leader confronting the tyrant, demanding to "let my people go". No. It is G-d speaking. He tells Moshe: go tell Paro to let *My* people go. Moshe is delivering a message. He is quoting G-d to Paro – he is but the messenger.

And that is the point. It is the story of G-d's Hand in history. He is the Active One, Moshe the mere messenger.



6TH ALIYA (4:18-31)

Moshe gets Yitro's blessing to return to Egypt. G-d tells Moshe that those seeking his death have died. G-d tells him to tell Paro: G-d says Israel is my first born. Send out My son, for if you do not, I will slay your first born. Zippora circumcises her son. Aharon greets Moshe. They gather the people. The people believe that G-d will redeem them.

G-d adds one more thing to Moshe; Israel is My first born. As if to say – "Moshe, this is a story of love. I view the Jewish people as my beloved first born." And. Refusal by Paro will result in Divine punishment.

Our western ethos is uncomfortable with these central principles of Judaism: G-d's Hand in history, G-d's love for the Jewish people, and Divine punishment. These are radical pillars of Judaism. As Rabbi Sacks, z"l, said; Radical then. Radical now.



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on the Bat Mitzvah of
their daughter Tova Libby



Mazal Tov to the proud Grandparents
Debra Applebaum and Ziva & David Katz
And to the Great Grandparents
Rabbi Shubert & Iris Spero



7TH ALIYA (5:1-6:1)

Moshe and Aharon approach Paro, requesting a 3-day journey to the desert to celebrate. Paro refuses. He increases the workload. Conflict arises between the Jewish workers and the Egyptian supervisors. The Jews criticize Moshe for increasing their burden. Moshe complains to G-d. G-d reassures him that through a strong hand, Paro will send them out.

What a great lesson: even when G-d Promises, don't think it is all clear sailing. His promises run smack into the uncomfortable reality of human beings. The plan for the Jews to leave runs into the reality of Paro and his resistance. Paro derails the plan, at least in part.

That is the lesson: man meanders as the Divine plan unfolds, up and down, forward and back. But resistance need not dull the end. The end will come. Maybe later than sooner. But a Promise is a Promise.

HAFTORAH:

YESHAYAHU 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23

This week's *haftorah* parallels the week's Torah reading on many levels. One of the parallels is the message of redemption conveyed by Yeshayahu—"and you shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel"—that is reminiscent of the message of redemption that G-d spoke to Moses at the burning bush, a message that Moses then communicated to Pharaoh.

The *haftorah* vacillates between Yeshayahu's prophecies concerning the future redemption, and his admonitions concerning the Jews' drunken and G-dless behavior. Yeshayahu starts on a positive note: "In the coming days,

Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom, filling the face of the earth . . ." He mentions Hashem's mercy for His nation, and the measure-for-measure punishment He meted out upon the Egyptians who persecuted them. And regarding the future redemption: "You shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel. And it will come to pass on that day that a great *shofar* will be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt will come, and they will prostrate themselves before the L-rd on the holy mount in Jerusalem."

The prophet then proceeds to berate the drunkenness of the Ten Tribes, warning them of the punishment that awaits them. "With the feet they shall be trampled, the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim . . ."

The *haftorah* ends on a positive note: "Now Jacob will no longer be ashamed, and now his face will not pale. For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, who shall sanctify My name . . . and the G-d of Israel they will revere." ■



STATS

13th of 54 sedras; 1st of 11 in Shemot.
Written on 215.2 lines in a Torah (18th).
7 parshiot; 6 open, 1 closed.
124 pesukim - 15th (tied with Emor).
1763 words - 14th (Emor: 22nd).
6762 letters - 16th (Emor: 23rd).
2nd in Shemot in those three categories.



MITZVOT

No mitzvot are counted from Shemot.
One of 17 sedras without mitzvot.

A SHORT VORT

BY RABBI CHANOKH YERES
RAV, BEIT KNESSET BEIT YISRAEL, YEMIN MOSHE

ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה (א:א)

"Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came into Egypt." (1:1)

Why the need to count the children of Israel again if they were just counted in Parshat Vayigash (46:8) with the same words, as they descended to Egypt?

Rashi explains that G-d counted them again after their death, to make known His love for them. For they were compared to the stars which He takes out and brings in by number and by their names (Isaiah 40:26). Rabbi Moshe Feinstein in his sefer "Drash Moshe" points out the significance of the Rabbis comparing Israel to the stars. Perhaps, this comes to emphasis that although we were granted free will, that allows us even to sin against G-d, we can reach a higher level of spirituality upon understanding the harshness of such an act. The paramount level one can reach is realizing that in essence we really don't have the ability to transgress against the Torah. This level was achieved by the tribes. Like stars which are taken out and returned in the same number, name and same cycle, without any free will. The children of Israel who secured such a height in spirituality, are worthy of being counted and named again, after their demise, like the stars. He brings a proof from the verse (Devarim 12:13) "You will not be able to eat within your gates." As Rashi explains: You may be able, but you are not permitted. - Shabbat Shalom

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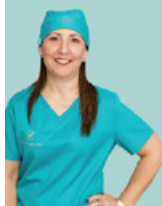
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THE PERSON IN THE PARSHA

BY RABBI DR. TZVI HERSH WEINREB
OU EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, EMERITUS

“The Road to Resilience”

Those of you who have come to know me during my current stage of life will be surprised to learn that I once had athletic ambitions. But I did.

It was especially during my teenage years when I was a student at RJJ, Rabbi Jacob Joseph High School on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. My favorite sport was basketball, and I spent more time perfecting my “jump shot” than doing my homework.

RJJ had a great basketball team, and I was sure that I could make the team. I tried my best for my first two years at the school and failed both times. The coach informed me that I should not even try again. It was a lost cause.

Imagine the sense of frustration and utter failure that I experienced, as a

sixteen-year-old, after that definitive rejection. I had prayed to succeed, but my prayers were in vain. What a letdown!

RJJ was blessed with a wonderful faculty of qualified teachers, many of whom were also empathic counselors. One of them, Mr. Joe Brown, was the advisor for the school newspaper, the RJJ Journal. Sensing my deep disappointment, he encouraged me to assume instead the position of sportswriter for the school newspaper.

“That way,” I remember him saying, “you will get to attend all the games and even sit on the bench. Your ‘downfall’ will lead to ‘achievement’.

Admittedly, it did not take me long to recognize that the entire episode was quite trivial, even petty, compared to all the challenges I’ve faced during the many decades since I was sixteen.

But the lesson I learned then was by no means trivial or petty. Quite the contrary, I eventually learned the principle that failure often becomes a

stepping stone for significant success. My failure in athletic endeavors led me to develop expressive skills, study journalism, and receive training in public speaking and creative writing. Abject adolescent frustration prepared me for a meaningful adult career.

At the very moment that I am writing this column I am also preparing to present a series of lectures. I am entitling it, “Lesser Known Twentieth Century Sages of Israel”.

One of the sages that I hope to discuss is



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Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlap (d. 1952). He was a deeply spiritual and intellectually brilliant scholar, who was the rabbi of the Shaarei Chesed neighborhood in Jerusalem. I have much to say about him, but I'll just share with you one of his insights, an insight that magnifies the significance of the story about my teenage development.

The insight is expounded in Rabbi Charlap's ninth volume, the one on *Sh'mot* (Exodus) of his multi-volume work, "*Mei Merom*". I hope to include many of his teachings in upcoming editions of this column. For now, permit me to introduce you to one of the concepts central to his approach to the entire Exodus narrative. It is the concept of "*yeridah l'tzorech aliyah*", "descent as a prerequisite for ascent".

Rabbi Charlap begins by expounding upon a process even more basic to Judaism than the Exodus from Egypt, namely the "descent of the *neshamah*" into the *guf*, the existential "descent" of the "soul" into the "body".

He finds a parallel between that process and the "descent" of Jacob and the tribes of Israel into the *galut*, the Exile into Egypt. He writes: "The soul, despite its intrinsic loftiness and greatness, cannot ascend and expand unless it merges with the body. It is precisely the same with the descent of the nation of Israel into exile... Thus, just as the soul never achieves its perfection without the body, so too was the descent into *galut* a necessary prelude to the growth and greatness of the entire holy nation."

"This", he concludes, "is the meaning of the opening of last week's Torah portion—'And Jacob **lived** in the land of Egypt'. His entry into Egypt, with his entourage, was not a "descent", but rather the atmosphere of the Holy Land that he left accompanied him and

entered Egypt with him. Thus, he '**lived**' even in Egypt and did not 'die' there."

This powerful insight of Rabbi Charlap prompted me to recall the resounding words of the Prophet Micha:

"Do not gloat over me, my enemy!

"Though I have fallen, I will rise—

"Though I sit in darkness

"The Lord will be light!" (Micah 7:8)

The second line reads in Hebrew *Ki nafalti kamti*. The midrash translates this a bit differently from the translation above. Rather, in Hebrew. *Ilmalei nafalti, lo kamti!* That is, "Had I not fallen, I would never have risen!"

Failure often, if not always, leads to ultimate success. Indeed, failure is necessary if one is to grow. As the Talmud puts it, "one cannot truly master the Torah unless he has first stumbled in its study—*ela im nichshal ba*"!

There is a lesson here for all of us, especially in these crucial times. *Galut* is a *yeridah*, life in diaspora is a descent. But we must grow from it, and one way is to learn its lessons. What are those lessons? There are many, and one must sincerely examine ourselves, even if we dwell in the State of Israel, and determine whether we have learned these lessons.

Our history should have taught us, and our history persists to this day, that we are surrounded by hostility, but there are ways to cope with it. But coping with it demands much of us.

1. We must be staunchly hopeful, and not despair.
2. We must be certain of our principles and values, especially our commitment to truth, compassion, justice, humility, charity, family, and yes, world peace. We must not yield to doubt those principles

or become skeptical of them or compromise them in any way.

3. And, perhaps above all, we must avoid discord among ourselves, we must attain genuine unity, *achdut*.

Three dangers, three d's: Despair, Doubt, Discord. They all characterized our years of Egyptian Exile, as we will learn from the Book of Exodus, *Sefer Shemot*, which we begin this week.

Yes, the years of slavery were a *yeridah*, a descent. But they offered us an opportunity to learn the lessons of doubt, despair, and discord, to correct them and to grow to become the *am hanivchar*, the Chosen People.

Our history was designed to be a descent to ascend. May we ascend in togetherness, hope, and faithful commitment to our eternal values. ■

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Leadership and the People

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 God 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 God 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, 'God did not appear to you'." (*Shemot 4:1*)

The Sages, ultra-sensitive to nuances in the text, evidently noticed three strange features of this response. The first is that God had already told Moses, "They will listen to you" (Ex. 3:18). Moses' reply seems to contradict God's prior assurance. To be sure, the

commentators offered various harmonising interpretations. Ibn Ezra suggests that God 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 God'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 God 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. God 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 it is written, *And the Lord said to him, 'Put your hand inside your cloak'*. (Ex.4:6., 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



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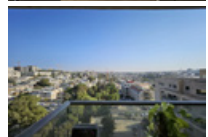
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wrong in his estimate of their character. Yet God reprimanded him; indeed punished him by making his hand leprous. A fundamental principle of Jewish leadership is intimated here for the first time: a leader does not need faith in himself, but he must 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-à-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 God to the people, but they are also the voice of the people to God. That, according to the Sages, was what God 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 God. 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

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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 God 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 God 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 God. "Those people of whom you have doubts," said God 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." ■

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A “Vineyard” Reborn!

Chazal’s selection for the haftarah of Parashat Shemot [according to Ashkenaz custom] is taken from the 27th and 28th p’rakim of Sefer Yishayahu. We find the opening of the selection to be somewhat difficult to understand, perhaps because of the fact that these introductory verses are taken from the middle of the perek [9 v.6]. As a result, we find our meforshim taking different approaches regarding the meaning of the initial p’sukim of the haftarah.

Rashi sees the words of Yishayahu, “**Haba’im yashresh Ya’akov**”, as being a connection to the opening pasuk of the parasha, “Eileh shmot B’nai **Yisrael haba’im...**”. He explains that the prophet was reminding his generation how “**Haba’im**”- those who **arrived** into Egypt, i.e. the children of **Jacob**, “**Ya’akov**” - “**yashresh**” - grew and **flourished** there. According to **Rashi**, Yishayahu was telling his nation that, even in Egypt, G-d blessed the children of **Ya’akov**

with remarkable growth - a reward for their loyalty and devotion to Hashem.

On the other hand, the bulk of the parashanim, including the **Metzudot**, **Radak** and **Malbim**, see the words of the prophet – NOT as a reference to the past generation, but as a depiction of the future era. As they understand it: “**Haba’im**” – “In the **coming** days”, “**yashrech Ya’akov**”, “the nation of **Jacob** will grow and **flourish**” and so, according to this approach, the navi foresees a time of revival and rebirth for Israel, when the nation returns to her land.

The **Malbim** also points to an earlier verse (v.2), one that precedes the haftarah itself, as being the connection to the verse that opens our haftarah. This pasuk portrays a future when the people will be singing praises about Israel as being “a vineyard of fine wine”. He enlightens us by defining this vineyard as Israel herself, declaring that during the long periods of exile, throughout the nation’s Diaspora years of suffering and bitterness, the “vineyard” of Israel seemed to have been destroyed. Upon Israel’s return- “**Haba’im**” - the “vineyard” of Israel will flourish and blossom - “**yashresh**”, as the remaining roots of the vineyard, long-thought to be destroyed and lifeless, will be brought back to life

And yet, despite these different approaches of our commentators in their respective understanding of the introductory words of

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the haftarah, the prophetic message itself remains unchanged. For, whether Yishayahu was referring to the remarkable growth of the first generation of Ya'akov's descendants in Egypt – as **Rashi** suggests, or whether the navi was referring to the flourishing of Israel in the generation of redemption – as most meforshim do, the essential message is the same. Yishayahu's lesson was addressed to a population that had witnessed the exile of their brethren in the north, and, therefore, a generation thirsting to hear words of hope, of optimism, of future.

And the prophet Yishayahu does just that.


Certainly, the message as understood by the **Malbim**, et al, comforted the nation by foreseeing a magnificent **future** for Israel, but even **Rashi**, who understands the message as referring to the **past** generation, sees it as an encouraging reminder to the suffering masses that, if Hashem could save an oppressed and enslaved generation, and bless them with growth – than He will certainly do so for the succeeding generation!

The navi teaches; the navi censures; and the navi comforts. ■

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Arguing With God?

In Parashat Shemot, we are introduced to Moshe. It is striking that in Moshe's very first encounter with Hashem at the burning bush, he argues with God. Four times Moshe resists Hashem's call to lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt. Later, at the end of the parasha, Moshe again uses bold language as he questions Hashem:

לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לָעָם הַזֶּה לְמֹהַם זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי: וּמֵאַיִן בָּאתִי אֶל־פְּרֹעָה לְדַבֵּר בְּשִׁמְךָ הִרַע לָעָם הַזֶּה וְהִצַּל לֹא־הִצַּלְתָּ אֶת־עַמְּךָ:

"Why have You mistreated this people? Why have You sent me? For ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has made things worse for this people, and still You have not saved Your people!" (Shemot 5:22-23)

At first glance, arguing with God may seem sacrilegious. But Moshe is neither the first nor the last in Tanach to do so. Avraham challenges Hashem in his defense of Sedom:

חֲלִילָה לָךְ... הֲשֹׁפֵט כָּל־הָאָרֶץ לֹא יַעֲשֶׂה?—"It is unbecfitting of You! Shall the Judge of all the earth not act justly?" (Bereishit 18:25)

Yirmiyahu voices the age-old question of theodicy:

“מָדוּעַ דֶּרֶךְ רָשָׁעִים צִלְחָה?”—"Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Yirmiyahu 12:1)

Others—Chavakuk, Iyov, many of the prophets—also confront God's justice.

And of course, throughout the Talmud the Rabbis argue constantly. Nearly every daf contains a machloket; Hillel and Shammai seem to disagree on almost everything. How, then, does Judaism view arguments? Is it negative—something to be suppressed—or positive, even holy?

ARGUMENT AS A JEWISH VALUE

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (in *Lessons in Leadership*) cites George Orwell, who wrote: *"If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear."* John Stuart Mill similarly argued that stigmatizing opposing views is a betrayal of freedom. This is profoundly aligned with Judaism. The Talmud famously states in the name of God regarding the debates between the schools of Hillel and Shammai:

“אֵלֶּי וְאֵלֶּי דְּבָרֵי אֱלֹהִים חַיִּים”—"These and those are the words of the living God." (Eruvin 13b)

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argument for two reasons:

1. ONLY GOD SEES ABSOLUTE TRUTH.

We, as finite human beings, perceive only fragments of the whole. Truth contains multiple angles. This is symbolized beautifully in the beginning of Parashat Bereshit where we find the Torah's two creation narratives—each true, yet each reflecting a different perspective.

2. JUSTICE REQUIRES HEARING THE OTHER SIDE.

For justice to exist, both prosecution and defense must speak. This is why Hashem *wants* Avraham and Moshe to argue—to plead on behalf of others. It is why genuine leadership in Judaism demands the courage to question.

The Netziv writes that the sin of the builders of the Tower of Babel was their refusal to tolerate disagreement (Ha'amek Davar, Bereishit 11:4). A society without dissent is a society without growth.

The Talmud further teaches that Hillel's opinions became halacha **because** his students were humble and pleasant, and because they taught Shammai's views *before* their own (Eruvin 13b). To reach truth, we must be willing to hear, and even to honor, views that differ from ours.

God Himself models this openness. He chooses prophets who will confront Heaven for the sake of Heaven—those who care so deeply about justice that they are willing to speak boldly to God.

THE COURAGE TO QUESTION —AND THE HUMILITY TO LISTEN

The great paradox of Jewish spirituality is that we become closer to God not by silencing our doubts, but

by bringing them to Him. Judaism does not demand blind acceptance; it demands honest engagement. The first steps of Moshe's leadership are not acts of obedience, but of *conversation*—wrestling, questioning, seeking to understand.

To argue with God, to ask hard questions, is not a sign of weak faith. It is a sign of a relationship strong enough to handle truth.

And yet, the Torah teaches that real argument—**machloket l'shem Shamayim**—is never about victory. It is about vision. It is grounded in humility, the willingness to hear another voice, even when it challenges us.

As we read Parashat Shemot, we are reminded that redemption begins when a person dares to speak honestly to God—and equally, dares to listen deeply to others. If we can bring that same courage and humility into our relationships, our communities, and our spiritual lives, then our arguments will not divide us; they will elevate us. They will become the very conversations through which we draw closer to truth, to one another, and to Hashem.

May we learn to question with integrity, to listen with humility, and to argue always—for the sake of Heaven. ■

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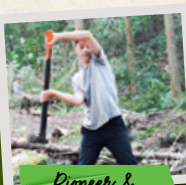
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Concealment Considered

"Vayelech ish mi-beit Levi va'yikach et bat Levi, vatahar ha-isha va'teled ben — A man from the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and bore a son." (Shemot 2:1-2) The Torah then relate how they placed their baby in a basket on the Nile, and subsequently the daughter of Paraoh found him and saved him. Is it not fascinating that only later, when the redemption shifts into full gear, we learn the names of this man and woman? Why is this information not revealed immediately? Why are Amram and Yocheved, Moshe Rebbeinu's parents, first introduced to us anonymously?

Chazal tell us that at the start of the terrible Egyptian oppression, Amram separated from his wife, as they did not want to have children who would be subject to the evil decrees of Paraoh. At the behest of his daughter Miriam's prophetic words, he remarried Yocheved.

The Zohar describes that this remarriage was arranged modestly, reflected in the concealment of their names. Chazal teach us, *"ein lecha yafeh min hatz'niut* — there is nothing more beautiful [praiseworthy, refined] than modesty." (Midrash Tanchuma 31) Amram and Yocheved model this quality for us to emulate.

The Maharal, (*Gur Aryeh*) notes that we generally attribute the greatness of a child to the greatness and merit of his parents. In concealing Amram and Yocheved's names, the focus is shifted to their child; they, as parents, remain in a secondary role. In the Maharal's understanding, Moshe Rabbeinu was destined to come into this world, if it were not through Amram and Yocheved, it would have been through others. Although in most circumstances, every child is gifted to a particular set of parents, and they are the only ones who can bring out the child's full potential, this was not the case with Moshe Rabbeinu.

Rav Shimon Schwab *zt"l* notes in *Ma'ayan Beit Hasho'eva* that concealing the names of Amram and Yocheved turns our attention to the lineage of the house of Levi; they merited to have this child because they were Levi'im. In the *zechut* of the Torah upheld by *shevet* Levi, they were given the opportunity to bear the redeemer of *Am Yisrael*.

Rabbi Meir Zvi Bergman in *Sha'arei Orah* offers a different approach that holds a

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powerful message for our lives. One may think that having a child like Moshe Rabbeinu requires special *yichus*. In concealing his parents' names however, the Torah underscores the truism that anyone can raise a child to greatness. Further, the Rambam teaches that we each have the capacity to become as great as Moshe Rabbeinu. One can't excuse himself from striving for greatness by saying, "I don't descend from greatness, what can be expected of me?" Lest one think that he will only achieve greatness if his parents are great, the Torah teaches here that the onus of responsibility is on each individual to actualize his potential greatness, irrespective of his roots.

Yichus can be compared to a string of zeros; each of us must find our way to place the "one" at the beginning to give the zeros value. More important than where one comes from is the direction in which one is going. ■

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SIMCHAT SHMUEL

BY RABBI SAM SHOR
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Sefer Shemot begins by recalling the names of *Yaakov Avinu's* children who came to live in Egypt, and the passing of that entire generation. The Torah then tells us:

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:
“וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם, אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:”

“A new king rose over Egypt, who did not know of Yosef.”

Our *meforshim* (commentaries) are struck by this statement, given *Yosef's* influence and prominence in Egypt, how could it be possible that just a generation later, a new King would come upon *Mitzrayim*, who did not know of *Yosef*?

Rav Shimshon Refael Hirsch zt'l suggests that the language of “A new King rose over Egypt” connotes not a normal legitimate succession to the royal throne, rather some sort of hostile takeover from a foreign power. Had the new ruler been part of the indigenous Egyptian royalty, he surely would have heard of *Yosef*!

Rashi quoting the *gemara* in *Sotah* offers these two keen insights:

וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ — *Rav and Shmuel differed in their interpretation of these words. One said that he was really a new king; the other said that it was the same king but he made new decrees.* אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָע — *he conducted himself as though he did not know him.*

Onkelos interprets the verse as follows:
וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְאָ חָדָתָא עַל מִצְרַיִם דְּלֹא מָקִיִּים גְּזֵרַת יוֹסֵף
- *And a new King rose upon Egypt, who did not fulfill the decrees of Yosef.*

What decrees or specific decree that *Yosef* enacted, did this new *Paroh*, decide to either ignore or do away with?

The **Chatam Sofer** zt'l offered this brilliant insight:

What was the gezeira which Yosef decreed?, that every Egyptian male should be circumcised. The Egyptians interpreted this as being a statement not solely of morality or values, but that somehow this would impact and control the population during the difficult lean years of famine which Yosef predicted.

However, *Yosef's* true intent was that if circumcision would become the norm within Egyptian society, then it would be ensured that the subsequent generations of the Jewish People who would come to live in Egypt, would not feel the pull to assimilate and give up the *mitzva* of *brit mila*.

As *Paroh* came to realize that the Jews were indeed continuing to have many offspring, and that circumcision did not impede fertility in anyway, he realized that he had misinterpreted the intent of *Yosef's* *gezeira*, and therefore chose to retract or ignore this

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decree, and end the mandate that every Egyptian male should be circumcised.

Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop *zt'l* points out that from the time of Yosef's initial meeting with Paroh, when Paroh summoned Yosef to interpret his troubling dream, and Yosef replies that it is Hashem who will offer the answer, Paroh had accepted Yosef's faith and trust in HaKadosh Baruch Hu. However, with his expressed desire to abandon and reject the decrees and lessons of Yosef HaTzadik, Paroh is essentially saying I no longer trust and put my faith in Hashem, I no longer trust you, or your G-d!

This actually comes out in Paroh's later reply to Moshe Rabbeinu- *I do not know your G-d, and I shall not set the Jewish People free.*

Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl, *shlita* astutely



Rabbi Avigdor Nebenzahl

points out that we learn a fundamental lesson from Paroh's changed approach and words. When a person forgets or denies the good that another person

has done for him, in the end this will lead to a denial of the good which Hashem does for each of us.

May each of us be blessed to learn this eternal lesson, to be steadfast in our practice of *hakarat hatov*, to continue to see the good in one another, to see and appreciate the divine spark within one another, and to appreciate the many, many gifts that Hashem provides each of us with day in and day out. ■



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Shovavim: Remove Your Shoes

When Rav Yehuda Zev Segal, zt'l, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, was visiting Vienna on matters relating to the Jewish community, he unexpectedly requested to be taken to daven at the kever of the Tchorckover Rebbe, Reb Yisrael Friedman, zy'a. Those travelling with the Rosh Yeshivah were taken by surprise. While the heilige Tchorckover, a grandson of the Rhizner Rebbe, was beloved as a great *tzadik* and *talmid chacham*, Rav Segal was a traditional student of Mir, davening at *kivrei tzadikim* was not part of his typical repertoire. Furthermore, the Manchester Rosh Yeshivah was known for his constant *hasmada*, singular focus on Torah study and Mussar. Exacting with his time, the Rosh Yeshivah was careful and deliberate with every moment of his day. Of what specific interest was davening by the Tchorckover's *kever*?

The Manchester Rosh Yeshiva explained that years earlier, he had heard a *ma'aseh*, a story about the Tchorckover Rebbe by which he was moved and inspired:

One afternoon, the Tchorckover Rebbe was taking a walk with his holy cousin, Reb Avraham Yaakov, the Sadigerer Rebbe. While the

two righteous men strolled through the park discussing lofty ideas in Torah and Avodah, they sat down to rest on a bench. When a non-Jewish woman sat right down next to them, the Sadigerer Rebbe immediately began to stand up, but the Tchorckover Rebbe placed his hand on his cousin's knee and flashed him a look to remain seated. After some time, the Tchorckover Rebbe glanced at his watch and feigned surprise, exclaiming audibly in German, "Oy, would you look at the time... it's getting late! Dear cousin, we have to go."

The Rosh Yeshivah said that being in Vienna reminded him of the extraordinary sensitivity of the Rebbe, and desired to daven by his *kever* in order to merit such *midos tovos* in his interactions with others.

Our sedra describes Moshe's sojourn into the desert to tend the sheep belonging to his father in law, Yisro. While shepherding, he takes note of the extraordinary sight of the Burning Bush:

וַיֵּרָא ה' כִּי סָר לְרֹאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹקִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנְיָה... וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-תִּקְרֹב הֵלֶם שֶׁלֹּ-נִעְלִיד מֵעַל וְגַלִּיד כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדִמֶּת-קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

"When Hashem saw that he had turned aside to look, God called to him out of the bush; And He said, 'Do not come closer. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.'" (Shemos, 3:5)

Rebbe Shlomo Ephraim of Lunshitz, the *K'li Yakar*, was the Rav of Prague and

successor to the great Maharal. He explains Hashem's request for Moshe to remove his sandals before the *Sneh Bo'er*. Shoes serve as a separation, a protection and buffer between our feet and that which we walk upon. While walking barefoot, we feel even the smallest pebble on the ground and the slightest presence of debris. At the *Sneh Bo'er* Hashem is summoning Moshe to become "Moshe Rabbeinu", to assume his responsibility and leadership. Asking Moshe to remove that which 'separates' him from feeling every bump and bristle was a way to further instruct Moshe in identifying with and being sensitive to the needs and feelings of the people in his charge.

"*Shovavim Ta't*" is a *roshei teivos*, an acronym for the *parshios* from Shemos through Tetzaveh, and the season in which they are read. According to mystical tradition, the season of *Shovavim* is a time of intensive spiritual inner working and opportunity for *tikun*, specifically related to matters pertaining to sexuality and other errors affecting the Sefirah of Yesod. The word *Shovavim* literally means 'wayward', as in...

שׁוֹבְבִים בָּנִים שׁוֹבְבִים, "Return, wayward sons." (*Yirmiyahu*, 3:22)

During these weeks where the Torah traces the transformative process of our Nation from exile and slavery to freedom and creating a dwelling place for the Divine Presence in the Mishkan, we are encouraged to focus on our own struggle for freedom from the *yeitzer ha-ra*. We are empowered to rectify our 'waywardness', to live with purpose and *kedushah*, and make our lives a more sensitive dwelling place for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*.

As we strive for deeper connectivity with Hashem and within our true selves, it is



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critical to remain aware of everyone around us.

Rav Avraham Genechovsky zt'l, the Tchebiner Rosh Yeshivah was a great *gaon* in Torah and *midos*. Once traveling on a bus, when a woman came and sat next to him. The physical proximity was uncomfortable and less than ideal. Rav Genechovsky turned to his seatmate and with a tone of concern. "I just want to let you know that I have '*kru-spidin*'...it isn't contagious, but I felt I should inform you." Understanding that he was sick, the woman quickly gathered herself, wished the Rav a *refuah sheleimah*, stood up and moved to another seat.

Later, the *talmid* accompanying him asked his Rebbi if not speaking the truth was really permissible in such a situation. Rav Genechovsky smiled: "I said the truth! *Kruspidin* is the Aramaic word used for *tzitzis*. But most importantly, I did not hurt the feelings of the woman who sat down next to me!"

In our pursuit of personal holiness, let us 'remove our shoes' to feel *where we really are*. While we are reaching for higher spiritual standards and intensive inner experience in our *avodah* this season, may we also 'go barefoot' before the 'Divine Presence' of other people. ■



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products as kosher-certified. As new technologies continue to emerge, it is essential for kosher supervisors to stay informed and knowledgeable.

It is equally important that kashrut-related questions be directed to individuals with sufficient expertise in the relevant manufacturing processes. A clear understanding of these procedures is critical not only for effective supervision, but also to enable *Poskim* to render accurate and reliable halachic rulings.

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One of the most innovative developments of 21st-century technology is biodiesel. Simply stated, biodiesel is an alternative fuel designed to replace conventional diesel fuel. One particularly fascinating application of biodiesel is its use in aviation fuel. Many commercial airlines have committed to using SAF (Sustainable Aviation Fuel), in which biodiesel plays a significant role.

While traditional diesel fuel (also known as petro-diesel) is derived from petroleum, biodiesel is nontoxic, biodegradable, and produced from what are known as biomass oils. Biodiesel is manufactured through a process called transesterification, which converts fats and oils into biodiesel and glycerin. This process involves adding methanol to fatty acids that have been separated from oils, along with a catalyst. After refining, approximately one-tenth of a liter of glycerin is produced for every liter of biodiesel.

The biomass oils used for biodiesel can originate from plant-based sources such as





soybean, canola, and corn oil. Animal fats are generally less common in biodiesel production, which might suggest that glycerin certification should be straightforward. However, another factor must be considered: the versatility of biodiesel refineries. These facilities can process a wide range of feedstocks, including waste products and even algae. This is where UCO—used cooking oil—becomes relevant.

Used cooking oil is collected as a form of waste recycling. In North America and many other countries, the fast-food industry is extremely widespread. These establishments use large quantities of vegetable oil to prepare a wide range of foods, including fish, meat, dairy, and *treif* products. Rather than discarding the used oil, it is often sold to biodiesel refineries for the production of biodiesel and glycerin.

From a kosher perspective, this presents a serious concern. Since these fast-food establishments are not kosher, the oil absorbs non-kosher substances, including, in some cases, *Basar B'chalav* (the biblical prohibition of mixing meat and milk). Consequently, OU Kosher considers UCO to be 100% *treif*. For this reason, OU Kosher does not permit the use of UCO in the production of glycerin intended for kosher certification within the biodiesel process—another important safeguard in helping Klal Yisrael maintain kosher standards.

LAUNDRY-GRADE KOSHER GLYCERIN

As mentioned in previous articles, glycerin

is a common ingredient in soaps, detergents, and cleaning products. The OU certifies certain glycerin and fatty acids for detergent use only. This is because OU Kosher does not certify detergents or cleansers simply on the basis that they are inedible. Rather, the standard for OU certification of detergents and cleansers is that there be no actual non-kosher substance present in the certified product.

Accordingly, the glycerin used must be a vegetable glycerin that is certified as “Kosher certified for non-food use only.” This designation indicates that the product is a pure vegetable glycerin that was produced on equipment (*keilim*) previously used for *treif*. Although these *keilim* were flushed to the extent that there is no actual non-kosher residue present in the laundry-grade product, they were not koshered.

As a result, this glycerin may not be stored or transported in food-grade kosher tanks or carriers without subsequent kosherization. This distinction ensures that kosher food production remains uncompromised while still allowing for appropriate certification of non-food products. ■

Kashrut Questions in Israel?

Call or Whatsapp Rabbi Friedman at
050-200-4432

רפואה שלמה

Peleg Shabtai ben Chaviva Leah

THIS WEEK'S INSPIRATIONAL TORAH LEARNING

**SUNDAY
JAN 11**

7:30 PM

Men's Safrut (The Bais)
Rabbi Tzvi Mauner
7 Hartum Street,
2nd Floor



*The schedule is subject to change

Subscribe to our OU Israel Whatsapp Community for all information related to OU Israel classes and programs, including last minute schedule changes and updates, by scanning the QR Code above.

THE BAIS CLASSES & PROGRAMS
ARE FOR MEN ONLY



#THEOUISTRAEL

**MONDAY
JAN 12**

8:30 PM

The Bais (for Men) - Semichat
Chaver Program Rav Elyada
Goldwicht@ **Bet Knesset**
Ohel Yitzchak
Keren Hayesod St.

OU Israel | Women's Division
2 Radak St., Rechavia

6:00-10:00PM

ATID Midrasha

7:00-9:00PM

Dorot Choir Session with
Hadassah Jacob

8:00-10:00PM

Geula Mini Series Part 2:
Panel Discussion

**TUESDAY
JAN 13**

OU Israel is supported by the Jewish
Federation of Broward County



COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN BAKAA

Classes @ Bet Knesset Nitzanim, 3 Asher Street, Bakaa

9:20 AM

Understanding Tefila
Rabbi Yossi Goldin

11:25 AM

Modern Masters Rabbi Sam Shor
(Rabbi Goldin resumes Feb. 3)

10:15 AM

Rambam: Letters & Introductions
Rabbi Yitzchak Breitowitz

12:20 PM

Unlocking the Messages of Chazal
Rabbi Shai Finkelstein

TORAH TUESDAYS WITH THE WOMEN'S DIVISION

Classes @ Beit Knesset HaNassi, 24 Ussishkin St. Rechavia

9:15AM

Torah Tapestry Parsha Shiur
Mrs. Shira Smiles

MODIIN-THE BAIS

Men's Programs in Modiin Yeshivat Hesder Meir Harel,
Emek Beit Shean 53, Modiin

10:00AM -2:00PM

Weekly Kollel Boker-Instructors include
Rabbi David Fine
Rabbi Ian Shaffer

Rabbi Aschi Dick

Rabbi Avi Herzog

1:00PM- NEW!!!

Modiin Lunch and Learn with Rabbi Aschi Dick
Masamerica Offices, 28 Dam HaMacabbiim St,
3rd Floor, Shiur followed by mincha at 1:45pm

7:30 PM Men's Safrut in **MODIIN** Rabbi Phil Schajer

7:30 PM Men's Safrut in **BEIT SHEMESH** Rabbi Elie Levi

This Week's Inspirational Torah Learning with OU Israel

WEDNESDAY
JAN 14

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN RECHAVIA

@ Bet Knesset HaNassi,
24 Ussishkin St., Rechavia

9:15AM

Holy Poetry

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Adler

10:20 AM

Contemporary Issues in
Halacha and Hashkafa

Rabbi Anthony Manning

11:25 AM

Mussar and Self Improvement:
A study of Rav Kook's sefer
Midot HaRayah

Rabbi Aaron Goldscheider

12:30 PM

Jews in the Middle Ages:
External Threats and Internal
Developments

Dr. Deborah Polster

SPECIAL EVENT:

1:00 PM

Estate Planning @ Beit Knesset
HaNassi, Rechavia

SPECIAL EVENT:

7:00-9:30 PM

Bat Mitzvah Chessed Event

THURSDAY
JAN 15

COMMUNITY BEIT MIDRASH IN ARNONA

@ Bet Knesset Shai Agnon,
11 Rechov Leib Yaffe, Arnona

9:15 AM

Parshat HaShavua

Rabbi Ari Kahn

10:30AM

Parashat Hashavua

Rabbi Baruch Taub

11:25 AM

Trailblazing the Text of Tanach

Rabbi Neil Winkler

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies- (the Bais)

Rabbi Aschi Dick @ Bet Knesset

Ohel Yitzchak, Keren Hayesod Street

BET KNESSET OHEL YITZCHAK

@ Keren Hayesod Street

8:00 PM

Halachic Controversies

(the Bais) **Rabbi Aschi Dick**

SPECIAL EVENT:

7:00-9:30 PM

Beit Shemesh Bat Mitzvah
Chessed Event

Rosh Chodesh Shevat

Women's Seminar in Beit Shemesh

Mitzvot HaTeluyot BaAretz: From Soil to Soul



BASYA TEITELBAUM

B'voachem El HaAretz:
Shevat, Growth, and the
Sanctification of the Ordinary



NILI TURETSKY

Rooted in the Land,
Reaching Toward
Redemption



SEPHA KIRSHBLUM

Yosef's Final Request:
Planting Seeds of Eternal
Love for Eretz Yisrael



SHOSHAN RAIZ

A Hands-On Journey
into Terumot and
Maasrot



Musical Hallel by
Yocheved Shull and Yocheved Kornfeld,
musical accompaniment by Miri Miller

Monday, Jan 19
8:15 am - 1:00 pm

Beit Midrash Torani Leumi
5 Reuven Street

50 NIS,
Brunch will be served

Register at: ouisrael.org/events/shevat2025BS

FOR GIRLS
AGES 9-12
AND THEIR
MOTHERS



OU ISRAEL

Women's Division

MOTHER-DAUGHTER TU B'SHVAT EVENT

Events taking place in multiple locations
around Israel the week of Jan. 18

Mother-Daughter
Chavruta Learning

Mini-Shiur

Kahoot
Competition

Tu B'Shvat
Art Project

- Beit Shemesh (Carlebach) - TBD
- Pardes Chana (Klal Yisrael) - Monday Jan 19
- Efrat (Makom Litzmoach) - Monday Jan 19
- Yerushalayim (Women's Hub) - Monday Jan 19
- Ramot (Ramatayim Tzofim) - Monday Jan 19
- Chashmonaim (Rimon Shul) - Tuesday Jan 20
- Carme Hanadaiv - (מועדון הדיירים) - Wednesday Jan 22
- Givot Eden - TBD

ALL EVENTS
RUN FROM
7:00-9:30PM



www.ouisrael.org/events/md-tubshvat2026



ROSH CHODESH SHEVAT

Women's Seminar in Yerushalayim

Mitzvot HaTeluyot BaAretz: From Soil to Soul



ZEMIRA OZAROWSKI

Director, OU Israel Women's Division
Words of Introduction



SHOSHAN RAIZ

Machon Torah V'Haaretz
Hands-On Terumot
and Maasrot



MICHAEL WEICHBROD

Founder, Homebound to Eretz Yisrael
Our 2000 Year Journey
Back Home



RABBI MOSHE LICHTMAN

Author, Translator -
Eim HaBanim Semeicha
Sacred Land, Sacred Fruits

MUSICAL HALLEL
WITH AVIGAIL
SCHEINFELD



Monday, Jan. 19
9:15 am - 1:00 pm



HaMerchav HaChevrat
161 Yaffo (lightrail - HaTurim)
Wheelchair Accessible



50 NIS
Brunch will be served

Register at: ouisrael.org/events/shevat2026



GEULA MINI SERIES: PART 2

PERSPECTIVES ON GEULA:

Discussion Panel



30 NIS



**RABBI MOSHE
TARAGIN**
RAM, YESHIVAT
HAR ETZION



**TZIPPORAH
PILTZ**
NASHIM LEMA'AN
HAMIKDASH



**RABBI ZAVE
RUDMAN**
SENIOR LECTURER,
MICHLALAH

MONDAY, JAN 12 @ 8 PM

OU ISRAEL WOMEN'S HUB -RADAK 2

What does Geula mean to you and what role does it play in your life?

Join us as we explore three distinctly different approaches that will deepen your understanding and inspire your relationship to Geula.

[OUISTRAEL.ORG/EVENTS/MINI-SERIESGEULA](https://ouisrael.org/events/mini-seriesgeula)



PROTECTING YOUR LEGACY THROUGH ESTATE PLANNING

Free Seminar on Defining Your Legacy,
Halachic Considerations, and Ensuring Your Wishes are Fulfilled

JANUARY 14, 2026

1:00PM

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SHIRA SMILES' SHIUR - TUE. DEC. 30TH

Dedicated by Elanna Rosenbaum le'ilui nishmat
Chaya Rivka bas Tzvi Hirsch a"h on her 2nd yahrzeit

SHIRA SMILES' SHIUR - TUE. JAN. 6TH

Dedicated by Rochelle Turetsky - In the Zechut of
the beginning of our learning Chumash Shemot,
the redemption from Egypt, may we be worthy
of the final redemption

SHIRA SMILES' SHIUR - TUE. JAN. 6TH

Dedicated on the yahrzeit of Elka bas Mendel HaLevi a"h
this Shabbat כ"א טבת, sponsored by her daughters Judy
Lebovits, Phyllis Wiener & Necha Kronenberg

RABBI TAUB'S SHIUR - THUR. JAN. 8TH

Sponsored in loving memory of Donna Sandberg,
Dina Raziel Bat Yichezkel & Chaya a"h
- by her sister, Rochel Leah Berman

SHIRA SMILES' SHIUR

Dedicated for the year in memory of
Elhanan Efram Ben Abraham z"l by Robyn Pocker

THE WED. MORNING BEIT MIDRASH PROGRAM IN RECHAVIA

Dedicated for the 2026 academic year l'ilui nishmat:
Daniel ben David z"l and Limud bat Avraham Strauss a"h,
and Mordechai ben Moshe z"l and Reizel bat Yosef
Meir Marcus a"h, zichronam livracha,
parents of Judy & Menachem Marcus

RABBI YOSHI GOLDIN'S SHIUR

Sponsored by Hedy & Ben Lipschitz

RABBI ASCHI DICK'S MODIIN SHIURIM FOR THE ACADEMIC YEAR

Dedicated by Rabbi Steven & Kim Ettinger in loving
memory of their parents Rabbi Zvi & Jean Ettinger
and Herbert & Leonore Shulman, zichronam livracha

RABBI BREITOWITZ'S TUE. SHIUR

Dedicated anonymously for the
refuah shleima of Evelina bat Galina

RABBI ADLER'S WED. SHIUR

Sponsored for the 2025 academic year by the Frist family
in memory of their beloved daughter and sister
Elisheva Frist z"l - אלשיבע סימא בת זלמן דל

RABBI MANNING'S WED. SHIUR

Sponsored for the 2025 academic year נשמת
ברנה בת ברנדית ע"ה ודליג בן קלמן זי"ל

RABBI GOLDSCHIEDER'S WED. SHIUR

Sponsored for the 2025 academic year נשמת
מרים בת אברהם ע"ה ושם טוב בן שלמה ז"ל

RABBI TAUB'S WEEKLY THUR. PARSHAT HASHAVUA SHIUR

Sponsored by The Jewish Legacy Foundation

RABBI ARI KAHN'S SHIUR

Sponsored for the 2025-2026 academic year by
Rabbi Michael and Jeri Laxmeter for the refuah shleimah
of their granddaughter Avigayil Sara bat Shaina Ahrona

RABBI SHAI FINKELSTEIN TUE. SHIUR

Sponsored for the 2025 - 2026 academic year by the
Sondhelm and Wertenteil Families in memory of
Mel & Sylvia David z"l

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Women's Division

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Radak 2- Women's Hub



January
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ouisrael.org/events/chavruta



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GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN

RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

MAGGID SHIUR ALL PARSHA AND ALL DAF, OU.ORG

Silent Heroism

Parshat Shemot marks the beginning of Moshe Rabbeinu's life and mission—the arrival of a figure who altered the landscape of human history. He ascended Sinai and delivered Torah. He confronted the might of Egypt and secured the freedom of an entire nation. His life remains one of the most dramatic stories ever lived, and his image towers over Yetziat Mitzrayim and the long desert journey.

Moshe's story begins far from the center stage. His first encounter with Hashem occurs on a quiet mountain, beside a bush that burns but is not consumed — a quiet, almost hidden moment of selection.

FIVE WOMEN

But even before that moment, Moshe's survival depended on others. His life would never have unfolded — he would not have

escaped Egypt's brutal decree — without five women who ensured that he lived. Their heroism was not marked by spectacle or public triumph. It was woven through courage, resolve, and quiet acts that shaped Moshe's future. Their bravery reminds us that redemption often begins in places no one is watching — through quiet, unseen heroism.

At each turn, the Torah draws our eyes to the margins, where history is quietly shaped.

IN THE DELIVERY ROOM

The first silent heroes are Shifrah and Pu'ah, the Jewish midwives who quietly defy Pharaoh's brutal decree, safeguarding newborn children. Their resistance is fraught with danger. Inevitably, Egyptian officials would notice that babies continued to live. Birth is never entirely hidden; it unfolds in full view, known and witnessed. Yet with steady resolve, they shield Jewish life.

Unable to control what unfolded in the birthing rooms, Pharaoh broadens his decree and commands that every male child — Jewish and Egyptian — be cast into the Nile. Ironically, the expanded order creates a narrow opening that allows Moshe to survive. He can be born quietly and hidden at home. Had Pharaoh's order continued to target newborns directly in the delivery rooms, Moshe would likely have been seized the moment he was born.

MARITAL COURAGE

Yocheved — Moshe's mother — is the next silent hero. Confronted by the grim likelihood

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that any child she bore would be doomed under Pharaoh's murderous decree, she separates from her husband, Amram. Yocheved finds the courage to reunite with Amram — and through that decision, Moshe is born. In this simple but profound decision — to build a family despite crushing circumstances — she shapes Jewish destiny. Without her moral resolve, Moshe would never have entered the world.

STAYS THE COURSE

The next silent hero is Miriam, Moshe's sister. Chazal describe her as the one who intervened after her parents separated, convincing them to reunite and continue building a family. She urged her parents not to surrender the future before it had even begun. Eventually Moshe is born, and hidden for three months. But the moment soon arrives when concealment is no longer possible. With no remaining options, he is placed in a basket and set upon the Nile.

Miriam does not walk away in resignation. She stands along the riverbank, watching the basket drift, refusing to abandon her brother to the currents. When he is discovered by an Egyptian princess, Miriam reacts with remarkable composure and ingenuity, offering to find a Jewish woman to nurse the child. In doing so, she reunites Moshe with his biological mother and ensures that the future redeemer of Israel is nursed by a Jewish woman.

We are responsible to act, to fulfill our duty, and to trust that HaKadosh Baruch Hu will determine the larger calculus.

LIFTED FROM WATER

At every stage of Moshe's fragile beginnings, courageous women — quietly, without public acclaim — move his story forward and

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rescue him from certain death. However, no figure is more instrumental to Moshe's survival and future than his adoptive mother, Batya — the daughter of Pharaoh. She sees a helpless infant floating along the Nile, and she recognizes that he is a Jewish child. Despite her father's decree, she chooses to act. She takes Moshe from the water and brings him into the palace, raising him within the corridors of power and exposing him to leadership, politics, and diplomacy.

It is Batya who gives him his name — "Moshe," for she drew him from the water. Her act is not only the physical rescue that saves his life; it becomes a defining symbol. Moshe is lifted from waters that could have drowned him — the literal river beneath him and the sweeping forces around him that sought to erase Jewish life. At every stage, heroic women quietly pushed back against



the system, intervening at the edge of danger and refusing to stand aside. Batya's rescue is simply the final link in a chain of women who preserved the child who would one day redeem a nation.

More often than not, the dramatic achievements of history are attributed to visible heroes — those who display courage on the open stage. Yet behind them stand quiet figures, acting with conviction in hidden corners, whose steadfast bravery is no less vital to the final triumph.

This pattern — dramatic figures supported by silent, unseen courage — is not only ancient. It has unfolded again in our own generation.

SILENT BRAVERY ON EVERY FRONT

The past two years have revealed uncommon reservoirs of bravery. Our soldiers positioned themselves on the frontlines of our people and our Land, across seven fronts, facing those who sought our annihilation. A generation often accused of comfort and distraction demonstrated instead a fierce readiness to sacrifice for the future of our nation. With the help of Hashem, we broke an axis of evil meticulously assembled along

our borders — forces whose singular purpose was our destruction. Their designs were shattered not only through strategy and might, but through the mesirut nefesh of young men and women who stood between danger and Am Yisrael, preserving Jewish history and protecting our homeland.

However, just as we celebrate the obvious heroes, we must not overlook the silent heroes who stood behind them throughout these long two years.

The families of the hostages, who endured an unrelenting nightmare — months and years of uncertainty, fear, and waiting, living every day suspended between hope and heartbreak. The families of those who fell — on October 7th and in the battles that followed — who continue to live with loss even as the country moves forward. Their ongoing strength, carried quietly and without fanfare, has been the strongest form of silent heroism. The families of the injured, who continue to shoulder the burden of recovery — physical and emotional — long after the headlines fade and the front recedes. And the thousands of women who held the country together, spending long weeks, lonely nights, and quiet Shabbatot without their husbands — serving through multiple rounds of reserve duty. Their quiet resolve steadied countless homes and kept our society functioning while others stood at the front.

Our success of the past two years is the result of Hashem's care, the courage of our armed forces, and the steadfast strength of these silent heroes — so often, silent women — who sustained our people and held our collective lives intact through a war that has tested every layer of Am Yisrael.



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QUIET BATTLEFIELDS

Having seen silent heroism up close — alongside the visible, dramatic heroism of our soldiers — we should also appreciate the long arc of silent courage throughout Jewish history. Jewish survival was secured not by armies or parades, but by generations who lived quietly and faithfully, carrying our story when the world offered no support.

There was the heroism of Jews who possessed no land to defend and no army to protect themselves — yet refused to surrender their identity or their future.

There was the silent heroism of believing in ancient nevuot (prophecies), even when history appeared to veer wildly from its promised direction.

There was the heroism of maintaining halachic fidelity under pressure, often in societies that resisted or ridiculed Jewish practice, and in conditions that made observance costly and complex.

There was the quiet strength required to build Jewish families and communities under immense social, political, and economic strain — brick by brick, generation after generation.

Our generation has merited the opportunity to display courage on the battlefield and in the broad struggle of Jewish history. Previous generations displayed their courage on far quieter battlefields, but their victories were no less decisive for the survival of our people. ■



OU Press is honored to partner with Rabbi Moshe Taragin on his new volume in Hebrew regarding the recent war ('Emunah B'toch Hahastara). This remarkable book is also available in English, "Dark Clouds Above, Faith Below"

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UPCOMING EVENTS

ISRAEL



OLIM COMEDY NIGHT

Made Aliyah? Need a good laugh? Come join us for a hilarious night of stand-up by Olim, for Olim. Don't miss this unforgettable night of comedy, community, and connection!

Wednesday, January 21 | The Jerusalem Theater | Rebecca Crown Theater



CHALLAH DANCE PARTY

Nefesh B'Nefesh invites Olot to join the Challah Mom for an inspiring and high energy community-wide Challah Bake event in Jerusalem!

Thursday, January 22 | NBN Aliyah Campus JLM

JLM



MEET TLV: COMMUNITY FAIR

Get the chance to meet a wide variety of organizations and communities, make new connections, and discover all the opportunities waiting for you in Tel Aviv.

Tuesday, January 27 | NBN TLV Center

TLV

OVERSEAS - TELL YOUR FRIENDS & FAMILY!



NBN ON TOUR: MIAMI

Meet our team, get answers, and move forward with your Aliyah plans with confidence.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 11 | MIAMI



NBN ON TOUR: BOCA RATON

Meet our team, get answers, and move forward with your Aliyah plans with confidence.

MONDAY, JANUARY 12 | BOCA RATON



IMAP INFO SESSION

Connect with the **International Medical Aliyah Program** experts, learn about medical licensure, and get guidance tailored to your goals.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 18 | BOCA RATON

RESILIENCE INITIATIVES



OPERATION H G 2026

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HAFTORAH INSIGHTS

BY REBBETZIN DR. ADINA
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Rooted Before Redemption

YESHAYAHU 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23

The Haftorah opens with a promise of growth at a moment when it seems least expected: הַבָּאִים יִשְׂרָאֵל יִעֲקֹב יִצִּיץ וְפָרַח יִשְׂרָאֵל, *In days to come, Yaakov shall take root; Yisrael shall blossom and flower.* The Malbim explains that these are not parallel phrases but two stages of national existence. Yaakov describes a people under pressure — inward, constrained, focused on survival. Yisrael describes a people able to expand — visible, confident, and generative. The order is deliberate. First Yaakov takes root. Only then can Yisrael blossom. Rooting happens underground. It is unseen, uncelebrated, and slow. But without it, growth collapses.

The Navi does not deny the difficulty of such moments; instead, he reframes it. Growth is not suspended under pressure, it simply moves beneath the surface. In Yeshayahu's vision, rooting is not passive endurance. It is active steadiness; the decision to remain anchored when conditions press inward and clarity is absent. It is the work of holding fast to shared responsibility even when outcomes remain unclear.

This language resonates powerfully in times when pressure is collective rather than individual. In recent months, many have experienced what it means to live in a Yaakov moment, when strength is measured not by momentum, but by cohesion; not by

confidence, but by care for one another. This, too, is the work of rooting.

The Haftorah insists that becoming Yisrael does not happen all at once. Transformation does not begin with visible success, but with a refusal to fragment under strain. A people becomes expansive only after it has learned how to hold together.

The Haftorah closes with a vision in which both names stand side by side: וְהִקְדִּישׁוּ אֶת־ קְדוֹשׁ יִעֲקֹב וְאֶת־אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִעֲרִצוּ, *They will hallow the Holy One of Jacob, And stand in awe of the G-d of Israel.* Yaakov, the name of struggle and inwardness. Yisrael, the name of dignity and presence. Hashem's name is sanctified not in the leap from one to the other, but in the faithfulness that sustains a people through the space between them.

And sometimes, the holiest work we do is simply to remain - unseen, uncelebrated, but deeply anchored - until the moment comes to bloom. ■



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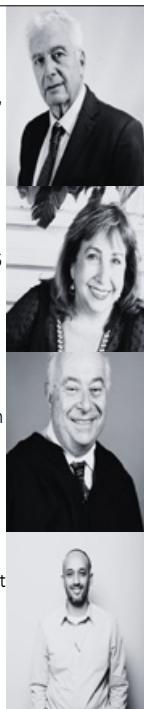
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Planting Seeds: Parenting Lessons from Moshe's Infancy

In this week's parsha, Parshat Shemot, we meet Miriam, who was standing watch by the water, waiting to see what would become of her baby brother, Moshe:

“ותתצב אחתו מרחק לדעה מה יעשה לו”

“And his sister stood from afar, to see what would be done to him.” (Shemot 2:4) Miriam waited to see that Moshe would survive physically. But her concern didn't end there - she also waited to make sure that he survived spiritually.

Rashi teaches that when Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, discovered Moshe in the basket and took him out of the river, she immediately tried to find a nursemaid to feed him. To her dismay, baby Moshe refused to nurse from all of the Egyptian women.

“מלמד שהחזירתו על מצריות הרבה לינק ולא ינק”

לפי שהיה עתיד לדבר עם השכינה”

“They brought him to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he would not nurse, because he was destined to speak with the Divine Presence.”

Miriam understood that this was the moment she had been waiting for. She jumped out of her hiding place and offered to find Moshe a Jewish nursemaid — bringing him, of course, to their mother, Yocheved. Yocheved nursed Moshe for two years (Shemot Rabbah). During that time, she didn't only sustain him physically — she nourished his soul. We can imagine Yocheved using those precious months to instill in Moshe Jewish values and beliefs, to sing him Jewish

songs, and to fill his earliest consciousness with the sweetness of Torah and connection to Hashem.

One might wonder- How much can a baby truly absorb at that age? He's too young to understand, too young to remember.

But **Rav Shlomo Wolbe**, in his classic work **חזקת חינוך**, teaches otherwise. He writes that education begins with planting





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seeds, even before a child can speak or understand:

”אם רוצים שהילד יצמח ליהודי הלומד תורה ומקיים מצוות צריכים לזרוע בו את הזרע של תורה. הוא אשר אמרו חז”ל: קטן היודע לדבר, אביו מלמדו תורה וקריאת שמע. דברים אלו הם הדברים שבהם יהיה שורש דיבורו.”

“If we want a child to grow into a Jew who learns Torah and fulfills mitzvot, we must plant within him the seed of Torah. As our Sages said: as soon as a child begins to speak, his father teaches him Torah and Shema. These words become the root of his speech.”

Rav Wolbe explains that those seeds planted when a child is still a baby are the key to his *chinuch*. The *Shema Yisrael* whispered at bedtime, the Torah stories told as he drifts to sleep, the earliest awareness that there is a Creator in the world, the warmth and love he receives from his parents, and the living example he witnesses in their actions — these are what make all the difference. Those early moments — the sounds, the tone, the atmosphere — leave a spiritual imprint that lasts a lifetime.

History bears this out. After the Holocaust, there were accounts of Rabbis entering Christian orphanages in search of hidden Jewish children. They would softly call out, “*Shema Yisrael...*” and some of the children, who had been placed there as babies and raised for years as Christians, would suddenly begin to cry, run to the Rabbis, and respond with tears. The seeds planted in those earliest years — a whisper of *Shema*, a mother’s lullaby of faith — were never erased.

The lesson is clear. As parents, we must recognize the tremendous significance of what we do, even — and perhaps especially — in the earliest stages of our children’s lives. It’s

easy to think that “real” parenting begins in the teenage years, when children can understand and discuss values and ideas. But the truth we learn here is that the most formative time to instill our values is during those very first years — in the quiet moments of early childhood, when the deepest foundations are being laid.

I wanted to conclude this article with a beautiful parenting insight brought down by **Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky**. Rav Kaminetsky notes that the **Rama** learns from Moshe’s refusal to nurse from the Egyptian women that there is a Halacha that a Jewish child should not be nursed by a non-Jewish woman (unless there is no other option). Rav Kaminetsky raises a powerful question: How can this be the basis of the halacha? Moshe was unique — he would one day speak face-to-face with Hashem! Surely this standard cannot apply to every child.

Rav Kaminetsky answers with the following insight - **Every** Jewish child has the potential to speak to Hashem! Every child has the ability to achieve greatness and to come close to HaKadosh Baruch Hu. When we look at our children, we must see not only who they are, but who they can become. Our task as parents and educators is to plant those seeds early — with faith that each child carries infinite potential. B’Ezrat Hashem, when we plant those seeds with love and faith, our children can grow and reach the highest of heights. ■

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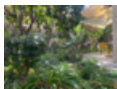
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EDITOR, TORAH TIDBITS
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Healthy Pride and Self-Confidence (Midot HaRa'aya, Ga'ava, Piska #25)

“Everyone who probes deeply into his own nature must assess the feeling of pride—determining which aspects of it are unworthy and alienate him from himself and from God, and which are refined, broaden the horizons of his mind, and remind him of his spiritual self, abounding in majesty and beauty.” (*Midot HaRa'ayah, Ga'avah, §25*)

In his treatment of pride and arrogance, Rav Kook teaches that one must take care not to suppress the healthy aspects of self-confidence that are essential to spiritual growth and inner happiness. Attempting to uproot all forms of pride is not only misguided, but spiritually damaging:

“If he should try to detach himself from this pride, not only will he fail to achieve

any good for himself, but he will stifle his spiritual powers. Angry and depressed, he will go about sad and bowed down. It will appear to him that dejection is an expression of nearness to God, whereas it is, in truth, a form of alienation and turning away from Him.” (*Ibid.*)

False humility, Rav Kook warns, often masks spiritual paralysis. Authentic closeness to God requires vitality, confidence, and joy—not self-erasure.

BOWING — AND IMMEDIATELY STANDING TALL

One of the most beautiful ways Rav Kook develops this idea is through the act of prayer. The daily bowing at the beginning of the *Amidah* teaches us that humility must be balanced with healthy confidence and self-worth.

In *Siddur Olat Re'iyah* (vol. 1, p. 267), Rav Kook explains that bowing and straightening up represent two stages of personal development. A person begins with inner negative forces that must be confronted, subdued, and refined. This difficult work demands humility and ego-subjugation.

This is the stage of bowing—bending oneself in order to weaken and eliminate what

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is distorted or destructive within.

Yet the act of straightening up immediately afterward is no less essential. Rav Kook emphasizes that self-negation is merely a preparatory stage. Its ultimate purpose is positive growth:

“The goal is to shine with the light of God in an abundance of strength and joy. Then all the powers of the soul straighten up and endure with courage and a lofty life force.”

First we bow—but then we stand tall.

Once freed from internal negativity, a person experiences continual strengthening of the inner self with every moral and spiritual advance. The Talmudic source for straightening after bowing is the verse, “Hashem straightens the bent” (Tehillim 146:8). Rav Kook reads this dynamically: God continuously strengthens and elevates those who first had the courage to humble themselves and subdue their negative impulses.

YOSEF AND AN UNSHAKABLE SENSE OF SELF

Among the figures of the Torah, Yosef stands out as the embodiment of healthy, enduring self-confidence. One of his defining traits emerges in the blessing Yaakov bestows upon Ephraim and Menashe:

“May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the youths. May they be called by my name and the name of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and may they multiply abundantly like fish in the midst of the land.” (*Bereishit* 48:15–16)

Rashi, citing the Talmud, explains that fish are unaffected by the *ayin hara*—the evil eye—because they are concealed beneath the water. What is the deeper meaning of this blessing, and why are Yosef’s descendants uniquely immune?

While some commentators understand the evil eye mystically, Rav Kook offers a strikingly rational interpretation. Human beings are deeply social creatures, constantly—often unconsciously—measuring themselves by the gaze and expectations of others. These subtle social pressures, communicated through glances, judgments, approval, or disapproval, shape behavior and suppress authenticity. This, Rav Kook teaches, is the *evil eye*.

Fish live entirely beneath the surface, untouched by the storms above. Yosef lived with similar inner autonomy. His deep self-assurance enabled him to withstand his brothers’ scorn, resist Potiphar’s wife, uplift fellow prisoners, and boldly interpret Pharaoh’s dreams when others failed. His greatness flowed from an inner world so stable that external judgment could not penetrate it.

Yaakov therefore blessed Yosef’s children to inherit this quality—to live without being pulled by the gravitational force of others’ expectations, and to remain immune to the *evil eye* that demands conformity.

LEAVING EGYPT WITH RICHES

When the Jewish people leave Egypt, they do so laden with gold, silver, and fine garments taken from the Egyptians. While it is understandable that former slaves would

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Why is material wealth such a critical element of the redemption story?

Rav Kook (Ein Ayah, Berachot 1:114) offers two closely related explanations. First, the wealth would restore the people’s shattered confidence and awaken a sense of self-worth and ambition after generations of degradation. Second, this material success was a necessary foundation for Israel’s broader mission: to illuminate the world with wisdom, morality, and divine consciousness.

Only a nation that commands respect can exert meaningful influence. Economic stability and success enable Israel to serve as a spiritual model on the world stage.

Rav Kook clearly saw this dynamic unfolding in modern times with the Jewish return to the Land of Israel. A prosperous and confident nation would naturally attract interaction and engagement—and through

that engagement, share its unique spiritual message with humanity.

CONFIDENCE AS A NATIONAL AND PERSONAL IMPERATIVE

Only with confidence and pride can we become the changemakers we are meant to be. The Jewish people can fulfill their historic mission of elevating the world only when each individual recognizes their intrinsic holiness and potential.

Rav Kook expresses this idea in soaring language:

“Smallness of faith and a person’s distance from supernal holiness stem from his failure to elevate his own self-worth—to instill in his heart the lofty idea that he is worthy of divine greatness.” (*Orot Yisrael* 160:8)

RAV KOOK AND “HOLY CHUTZPAH”

The Talmud teaches: “In the footsteps of Mashiach, chutzpah will increase” (*Sotah* 49b). This statement is often understood as a warning of moral decline and brazen arrogance.

Rav Kook, however, reads it optimistically. A generation will arise with the audacity to return to the Land, to wrestle with ultimate questions, and to seek religious meaning with courage and honesty. This “holy chutzpah” reflects not spiritual decay, but authenticity—a refusal to settle for shallow answers or passive existence.

LIFE LESSONS

- Recognize that your actions always influence those around you—live consciously and responsibly.
- True *gevurah* and self-confidence lie in perseverance. Begin again, even if you have failed many times before.
- We often know what is right but lack the strength to follow through. Decide who

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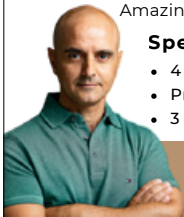


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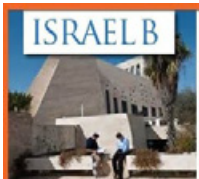
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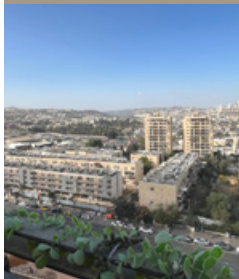
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Giving Away Offensively Left Materials

לעילוי נשמת
 יואל אפרים בן אברהם עוזיאל זלצמן ז"ל

Question: Contractors have been using an area in our building for deliveries during apartment renovations. Some materials have been left there for extended periods, creating an unsightly situation. Building management announced that materials must be removed within a specified timeframe, after which they would be declared *hefker* (ownerless) and available to anyone. Does management have the halachic authority to declare others' property *hefker*, even with warning?

Answer: We understand that you are asking only out of halachic "curiosity," which allows us to answer you. Nevertheless, since you have not relayed potentially impactful details that are likely difficult to determine, our answer is quite general. We will take a quick look at a few scenarios and halachic concepts.

Aveida mida'at: The *gemara*, in a few places excludes from the *mitzva* of *hashavat aveida* (returning lost objects) an object that is an *aveida mida'at* (when the object is in a precarious situation and its owner does not act to protect it). The Tur (Choshen Mishpat 261) says that in such a case, the object is presumed to be *hefker*, whereas the Rambam (Gezeila 11:11) says that while *hashavat*

aveida does not apply, the owner still owns it, so that it is forbidden for others to take it. The Shulchan Aruch (CM 261:4) rules like the Rambam, and the Rama (ad loc.) cites the Tur. The fact that some *gemarot* imply one way and others the other way (see Bava Batra 87b and Bava Matzia 21a) provides impetus for *poskim* to make distinctions. Thus, each side in the *machloket* can agree with the other side in exceptional cases (see Encyclopedia Talmudit, s.v. *aveida mida'at*).

One of the *gemara*'s cases of *aveida mida'at* (Bava Metzia 31a) is similar to our case. Reuven's cow was grazing in a (non-Jewish) vineyard, and the vineyard owner warned Reuven that if this persisted, he would kill the cow. The *gemara* says that if Reuven ignored the warning, it is *aveida mida'at*, and it is likely that the *machloket* of the Rambam and Tur applies here (see Even Ha'ezer Gezeila 11:11). Most explain that whether it is *hefker* depends on the assumptions about the object owner's mindset (see Beit Yosef, CM 261), which would make it dependent on the specific case. In our case, too, contractors ignore the warning of having their materials confiscated, raising the question of what they are thinking when they leave them there.

Several *poskim* recommend putting up signs in *batei midrash* to tell people they will relinquish their rights to *sefarim* left for a long time (see

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Living the Halachic Process III, I-12). However, this will not work here, if the noncompliant contractors are not agreeable to management's dictates. Therefore, unless we can assume the contractors do not care about the remaining materials, *aveida mida'at* will probably not make them available to be claimed.

Authority to force removal: At times, one may take strong, unilateral steps to ensure their rights (see Bava Kama 27b-28a; Shulchan Aruch, CM 4). If Shimon's objects impede use of Reuven's property, Reuven can take steps that include breaking the objects to get by, but not to purposely break them. Factors that affect what Reuven can do include prominently how necessary it is to take the steps and how grievous Shimon's actions were (see Pitchei Choshen, Sh'eila 1:25). In one very grievous case (Bava Metzia 101b; Shulchan Aruch 319:1), Reuven can sell some of the objects to pay porters to remove the others.

However, this is an insufficient precedent regarding your question. Shimon's ownership can be overlooked only to the extent needed to move the objects, not to give away the

offending objects. The contractors' objectionability is also not as severe as the one in the *gemara's* case. If management is forbidden to confiscate, it also distinguishes our case from that of Bava Metzia 31a, where it is *aveida mida'at* because the non-Jew's threat will not be tempered by Halacha.

Therefore, without casting final judgment, one would be hard-pressed to allow people to claim the materials if the owners want to keep them. ■

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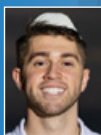
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From Yericho to Yerushalayim

During Chanukah, we took advantage of the rare opportunity to visit the palaces of the Hasmonean kings in Yericho. This rich archaeological site is generally not accessible to the Israeli public, but opens several times a year through the coordinated efforts of the Binyamin regional council and the IDF. One of the many unique features of this site is the ruin of what is considered the oldest synagogue in Israel, dating to the Second Temple era. The synagogue faces west, toward Jerusalem. In keeping with the spirit of Chanukah, costumed street actors enacted a scene that may have taken place two thousand years ago, when the synagogue was about to be built. While one of the actors played the role of the urban Jerusalemite who advocated for building the synagogue, his foil, a simple farmer from Yericho, was initially shocked at the idea of a center for prayer outside of the Beit HaMikdash. A place in which prayer

would be distinct from the sacrificial rites of the Temple, in which people could assemble without the Kohanim conducting the service and blessing the people? Unheard of! A chance to pray and merit divine attention without having to make the costly and sometimes difficult trip to Jerusalem? Too good to be true! It was a thought-provoking presentation. We are so desensitized to the privilege of gathering together in our shuls and batei midrash to daven, learn and celebrate life cycle events, that we often don't fully appreciate what was once a tremendous novelty.

As we study the chapters of Divrei HaYamim detailing Shlomo HaMelech's building of the Beit HaMikdash, let's pause to reflect upon its relevance. Rav Wolbe teaches that in order to achieve the necessary degree of concentration when standing before Hashem in prayer, preparation is required. The first stage of preparation is based on a teaching in the gemara: Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Shimon bar Rebbi were sitting together. One of them opened by saying, 'One who prays must direct his eyes downward [toward the earth of the Land of Israel], as the verse [in Divrei HaYamim] states: *והיו עיני ולבי שם* - *and My eyes and My heart shall be there for all time.*' The other responded, saying, 'One who prays must direct his heart



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upward [toward Heaven], as it says (Eicha 3:41) “נשא לבנו אל כפיה” - *Let us lift our hearts with our hands.*” Meanwhile Rabbi Yishmael ben Yosi came over to them and inquired what they were discussing. They told him they were discussing prayer. He offered: My father taught that one who prays must direct his eyes downward and his heart upward, in order to fulfill both of these teachings.¹

Rav Wolbe explains that preparation for prayer requires that we nullify all thoughts of physical pleasure, elevating ourselves above the material world, and then imagine ourselves standing in the Beit HaMikdash. The very same eyes that can lead us astray should be used to visualize ourselves standing in the Temple, the locus of holiness on Earth.²

This degree of concentration requires a great deal of consistent effort. The more we know about the Beit HaMikdash, the greater the chance we have of achieving the visualization described by Rav Wolbe. The Beit HaMikdash was the ultimate expression of Kedushat Makom, holiness of place; it was a nexus of Heaven and Earth where the presence of the Shechinah could be most fully experienced. After the destruction of the Temple, we strive to connect to that source of holiness by directing our prayer toward the place where it once stood and where Hashem’s “eyes and heart” remain focused, and by directing our hearts toward the Heavens to where the full force of His presence has withdrawn. The paradigm for this attitude was set even while the Temple still stood, as evidenced by the ruins of the synagogue in Yericho. May we

merit to realize the great privilege of standing in prayer in all of the places in which we currently pray, and in so doing achieve greater power in our prayers, leading to the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash where we will once again serve Hashem as envisioned by Shlomo HaMelech. ■

Mrs. Leah Feinberg is a master educator who taught at the SKA High School for Girls in Hewlett for twenty-one years, also serving as Tanach Department chairperson and New Teacher Mentor. Leah is currently on the faculty of the OU Israel Center and has taught in all three cycles of the OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi program

In the **OU Women’s Initiative Nach Yomi series**, currently in its third cycle, women scholars deliver a daily shiur on the books of Prophets (Neviim) and Writings (Ketuvim) at the pace of a chapter a day. Shiurim are geared toward learners of all levels who would like to participate in the two-year Nach Yomi study cycle. Visit the OU Women’s Initiative to register for additional content.



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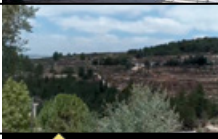
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From Pain to Peoplehood: Growing into Nationhood

The transition into adulthood is rarely gentle. It is often marked by rupture, confusion, and pain. To grow is to leave behind a sheltered world and step into responsibility, vulnerability, and purpose. Something must be lost for something deeper to emerge. What is true for individuals is no less true for nations. The Torah teaches us that nationhood itself is not born in comfort, but forged through struggle.

Personally, I am always a little sad to finish the book of Bereshit. For twelve weeks we immerse ourselves in complex personalities and character traits; in struggles with fertility, marriage, and sibling rivalry; in actions that seem momentous and others that appear insignificant, yet all shape destiny. We come to know our Avot and Imahot as individuals, couples, and as families. Sefer Bereshit is the long, foundational process of forming people. And then we turn the page.

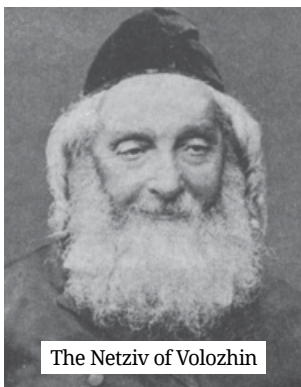
We now embark on the next journey—Sefer Shemot—the story of becoming a nation.

The Netziv famously refers to Sefer Shemot as Sefer Sheini, the second book of creation.

Bereshit is not merely a story of beginnings; it is the groundwork. But creation is incomplete if it ends with the perfected individual. The ultimate goal of creation is the emergence of a nation that carries divine values into history. That is where Sefer Shemot begins—not as a new narrative, but as a continuation of creation on a higher plane. A family must become Am Yisrael.

And that transformation can only occur through descent before ascent. This truth was already taught to Avraham through the Brit Bein HaBetarim. Nationhood would require exile before redemption, darkness before revelation.

The Torah is unequivocal: Slavery, oppression, and suffering were not unfortunate detours; they were the crucible in which a people was formed. Only after enduring degradation together, crying out together, and discovering a shared destiny could Bnei Yisrael stand at Sinai and receive the Torah—not as individuals, but as a nation bound by responsibility for one another. (Of course, following the receiving of the Torah, are the many commandments to build the Mishkan, a resting place for the Shchina. Also,



The Netziv of Volozhin

something that could not have taken place out of order of events)

Growth, whether personal or national, is painful precisely because something real is being born.

On October 7, our nation was thrust into profound pain. The shock shattered assumptions we did not even realize we were holding. Lives were taken, communities were devastated, and a sense of security was torn away. The grief is real and unresolved.

And yet, something else happened.

We did not dissolve—we gathered. We reached for one another. Across divisions that once felt insurmountable, Am Yisrael rediscovered itself. We were reminded, in the most visceral way, that we are bound by shared fate and shared responsibility.

Like the descent into Egypt, October 7 was not chosen. But the response was. And in that response, something essential was reclaimed. Out of the pain, we became a nation again—not because suffering sanctifies itself, but because it strips away illusion and forces clarity. It reminds us who we are and why we exist.

This past week we observed Asarah b'Tevet, the day that marks the siege of Jerusalem—the beginning of the process that led to the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash. And yet it is a fast day of prayer and hope for its complete rebuilding. (May it be this year!)

On that very day, we were blessed to celebrate the brit milah of our first grandson, Amichai Binyamin Meir. Mazal tov.

Amichai—“My nation lives”—is both declaration and defiance. It proclaims that despite history's relentless tests, Am Yisrael endures. Not only biologically, but morally and spiritually. Jewish continuity does not come from forgetting pain, but from transforming it into

resolve.

This truth is captured powerfully in the prophetic verse recited at a brit milah: “ואומר: “לך בדמיך חיי” —“And I said to you: By your blood, live.” The image is unsettling, yet it has never resonated more deeply for me than at the brit of Amichai Binyamin. Yechezkel describes a nation abandoned and wounded, lying in its blood. God does not erase the blood or deny the pain. He speaks directly into it: Within it, despite it—live!

Chazal explain that this verse refers to two bloods: the blood of the Korban Pesach and the blood of brit milah—the acts that transformed a broken slave population into a covenantal people. Life did not begin once the blood was gone; it began through commitment, covenant, and the choice to live with meaning even in vulnerability.

From Bereshit to Shemot, from Egypt to Sinai, from October 7 to the fragile hope of tomorrow, the message is the same: growth is painful, but it is not meaningless. Out of suffering can come responsibility and connection. Out of fracture, peoplehood.

Out of loss, life.

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A Medical Milestone and a Shared Vision

Last week, Rabbi Yitzchak Ginsburg and Dr. Abed Halaila held a joint press conference that was unexpected and very moving.

A year ago, Rabbi Ginsburg, who is closely associated with Chabad and with many of the “hilltop” communities, underwent a kidney transplant at Hadassah Ein Kerem hospital. Other medical centers had declined to operate on him due to his advanced age, but Dr. Halaila, head of Hadassah Ein Kerem’s transplant unit, reviewed the file of the 80-year-old rabbi and agreed.

“Age is only a number,” he explained this week. “A kidney transplant can be beneficial even at an older age, enabling the patient to continue giving.”

The donor was there through the Matnat Chaim organization. Senior Hadassah leadership attended as well, headed by Prof. Yoram Weiss. With everyone present, the rabbi delivered a brief teaching on the meaning of kidneys in Jewish thought. Dr. Halaila sat beside him, and when the rabbi called him a “righteous gentile,” he patted his hand. Dr. Halaila smiled and then shared what had impressed him most.

“I asked to check what the rabbi has done since the transplant,” he said. “Well, every Shabbat, a booklet of his is published in Hebrew — 13,000 copies, as well as an English edition read by thousands here in Israel and around the world. It’s simply

incredible. This year he published eleven books of Torah scholarship and three children’s books, and he’s planning another six in the coming year.” He added: “The rabbi has a book about the ‘Fourth Revolution.’ I urge you to study this topic. It’s very important, and I personally believe in it.”

“The Fourth Revolution” is a concept Rabbi Ginsburg has




At the gathering marking one year since the successful transplant, it felt as though one could already see the first shoots of that idea beginning to emerge. ■

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RABBI ASAF AHARON PRISMAN

GUEST DVAR TORAH

The Quiet Heroines

WHY THE TORAH CHOSE HUMBLE NAMES FOR HISTORY'S GREATEST HEROES

When the Torah recounts one of history's most pivotal moments—two midwives defying Pharaoh's genocidal decree—it chooses an unexpected detail to highlight. Rather than emphasizing their world-changing courage, it calls them by names describing their gentlest actions: Shifra, “she who beautified,” and Puah, “she who cooed” (*Shemos* 1:15). According to the Gemara, Shifra would tenderly straighten the newborns' limbs while Puah would soothe crying babies (*Sotah* 11b).

These were towering figures—Yocheved was married to the generation's leader Amram, while Miriam was a prophetess whose defiance saved the Jewish people from extinction.

Yet the Torah immortalizes them through intimate moments of care rather than their monumental heroism. What does this reveal about how Hashem measures greatness?

THE TRUE TEST OF CHARACTER

Rav Shimshon Pincus offers a striking analogy (*Tiferes Shimshon, Bereishis*). During a medical emergency, while doctors frantically work to save a child's life, the mother simultaneously strokes the baby's head and whispers comfort. This tenderness doesn't detract from the lifesaving work; it reveals the depth of her love and her ability to maintain focus on crucial details amid overwhelming circumstances.

While saving the Jewish nation, Yocheved and Miriam never forgot to comfort each frightened newborn. The Torah emphasizes their names because maintaining gentleness during crisis exposes one's truest character.

PRACTICAL TAKEAWAY

This week, pay attention to your small interactions: how you speak to a cashier when you're stressed, whether you hold the door when you're rushing, or how you respond to interruptions at home. These moments—not just your major accomplishments—reveal and shape who you truly are. Choose one small daily interaction and consciously bring extra patience or kindness to it.

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Torah and his devotion to community service. His wife, who was deeply involved in *chessed*, focused in particular on helping impoverished orphans marry and build their own homes.

Rabbi Pincus shared a story about a wedding she was organizing. She took care of every detail, but before the wedding, Rabbi Heiman asked, “Did you also buy flowers for the *kallah*?”

She responded, “I’ve taken care of everything, but I didn’t think it was right to use *tzedakah* money for flowers.”

Rabbi Heiman immediately replied, “No, no, we must buy her flowers. It’s very important.”

Rabbi Pincus explains that Rabbi Heiman wanted the *kallah* to feel just like any other bride, deserving of every detail. But he also said, “A mother never hesitates to give flowers to her daughter on her wedding night. You must be like a mother to this girl.”

In this powerful lesson, Rabbi Heiman emphasized that it’s not just about managing *tzedakah*—it’s about offering the love and care of a mother. ■

Rabbi Asaf Aharon Prisman, author of “Prism of Torah” and host of the weekly podcast under the same name, cultivated his unique Torah perspective through studies at Toronto’s Yeshivat Or Chaim and several prestigious Israeli yeshivas. Now based in Ramat Beit Shemesh, he combines his roles as an author, podcaster, and a Ram at Yeshivat Ateres Yaakov where he gives the daily daf yomi shiur & gives personalized Gemara tutoring, where he makes profound Torah concepts accessible to all.

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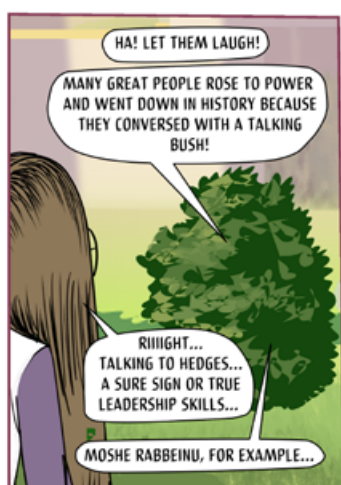


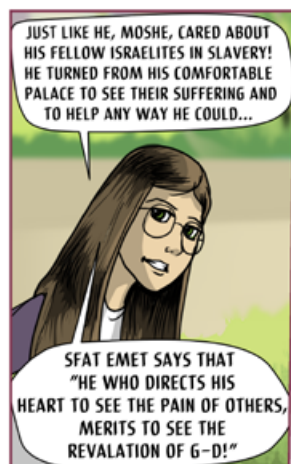

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NO RISK, NO REWARD!

We begin the second book of the Torah, **Shemot**, where we read about the Children of Israel multiplying in Egypt and Pharaoh's frustration that they continue to increase in number. In response, he orders the Jewish midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth.

The Torah states (Shemot 1:20–21):

“וַיִּטֵּב אֱלֹקִים לַמִּיֻּלָּדֹת וַיִּרְבַּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ מְאֹד:
וַיְהִי כִּי־יֵרְאוּ הַמִּיֻּלָּדֹת אֶת־הָאֱלֹקִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בְּתִים:”

“And God dealt well with the midwives; and the people multiplied and increased greatly. And God established households for the midwives.”

What does it mean that Hashem “dealt well with the midwives”? What was their reward for saving the Jewish babies?

Rashi comments that the reward for the midwives was that Hashem established households for them. The Or HaChaim, however, points out that if that were the full explanation, there would have been no need to interrupt the sentence with “the people multiplied and increased greatly.”

The pasuk teaches us something deeper: the very increase of the Jewish people was connected to the midwives’ courage and care. By feeding and protecting the newborns, they enabled the growth of the nation. Hashem

“dealt well” with them—not only by establishing their households, but also by providing them with sustenance and the means to continue their life-saving work. Their bravery and willingness to risk their own safety directly contributed to the flourishing of the Jewish people.

From Shifrah and Puah, we learn the sacred value of every single Jewish life. Each of us has a responsibility to help—physically, financially, emotionally, and spiritually—to ensure the safety and well-being of our fellow brothers and sisters. True reward comes not just from personal gain, but from selfless action on behalf of others.

Shabbat Shalom



SHELLEY NAYOWITZ,
10TH GRADE, JERUSALEM

FROM YOSEF TO MOSHE: A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

As we begin the book of **Shemot**, we transition from Yosef’s story to Moshe’s story. Moshe was the greatest leader of the Jewish people, so it is interesting that toward the end of the book of **Devarim**, we see Moshe begging Hashem to let him enter the Land of Israel.

Moshe said to Hashem, “Master of the Universe, Yosef’s bones entered the Land, but I did not enter the Land?” Hashem replied, “He who acknowledged his Land is buried in his Land, and he who did not acknowledge his Land is not buried in his Land” (Devarim Rabbah 2:8).

But when did Yosef acknowledge his Land? Yosef acknowledged the Land when his master's wife said, "Look! He brought us a Hebrew man..." and he did not deny it. Rather, he said, "I was stolen away from the Land of the Hebrews." Because of this, Yosef was buried in Israel (Bereshit 39:14). However, in this week's parsha (Shemot 2:19), when Moshe heard Yitro's daughters say, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds," he remained silent. Therefore, he was not buried in Israel, as he did not acknowledge that he was a Hebrew man and not an Egyptian man.

This comparison does not seem to make sense. After all, Yosef grew up in Eretz Yisrael and was truly stolen from there, whereas Moshe had never stepped foot in the Holy Land.

Rabbi Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtza explains that from the moment Hashem promised the Land to Avraham Avinu, every Jew must see himself as a native of Eretz Yisrael. This means that if a Jew who lives outside of Israel is asked where he is from, he must say, "I am from Eretz Yisrael, but for the time being I find myself in a temporary dwelling place in the Diaspora." That is what Moshe should have said when Yitro's daughters called him Egyptian, because a

Jewish person and the Land of Israel are incomplete without one another. ■

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