

*Ohr Someach* in Yerushalayim. He had decided that he wanted to learn what it means to be a Jew. I did not waste a minute. I immediately purchased a ticket and flew to Yerushalayim to confront my son. I was going to talk him out of this *narishkeit*, foolishness. Then, suddenly when I saw my son sitting and learning in the *bais hamedrash*, I remembered my father's tears.

"So, on this centennial of my father's arrival in America and on his *yahrtzeit*, I made this *Siyum* in order to tell America, 'America, you beat us Jews bad, but you did not win!'

"And to tell my papa, 'Papa, you were beaten badly, but you did not lose.'"

**ותפתח ותראהו את הילד והנה נער בכה ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה**

**"She opened it and saw the boy, and behold! A youth was crying. She took pity on him and said, 'This is one of the Hebrew boys.'" (2:6)**

Sequentially, it would have made sense to write that the infant was a Hebrew child first and only afterwards (despite the child's ancestry) that she took pity on him. One would think that the child's Jewish identity was the most significant aspect of the *pasuk* – not her act of compassion. *Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, feels that the reversed sequence teaches us an important lesson, one which (I feel) we should all apply to our personal lives.

Upon seeing someone in pain, an organization in serious need, we are confronted with two immediate reactions: empathy, compassion to reach out and help as much as I can; or to ask myself is it feasible? Will I (one person) really make a difference, is this the type of person/organization I really want to help and be involved with? Can I justify spending time, money, effort on such a person/ organization, when, in fact, there will be no gratitude forthcoming, and perhaps even abuse? In other words: compassion versus cold reality; immediate heartfelt empathy and action in contrast with feasibility and long-term efficacy.

Now, let us see what Bisyah, Pharaoh's daughter, did when she chanced upon the infant, Moshe, in the basket. She immediately took pity on this child, before checking his identity bracelet. She did not ask: Who is he? Jewish, but what kind of Jew? *Frum*, *yeshivishe*, *Chassidishe*, *heimish*, or not *frum* – who are his parents? Will he ever thank me? etc. – the usual questions. Bisyah wanted to help without regard for the outcome or the risks involved.

Indeed, as *Rav Alpert* observes, this, too, was Moshe *Rabbeinu's* nature. When he saw a *Yid* in trouble, he intervened without thinking of his own danger. This was a situation that could have cost him his life. Yet, he did not care: a Jew was in trouble. Rather than walk away and think of himself (rightfully

so), he acted. You see, Moshe already *ra'ah b'sivlosam*, saw/empathized with their bondage.

Bisyah had every reason to look away, ignore the infant. A Hebrew child was an anathema, reviled by the country and the focus of her own father's decree of infanticide. Nevertheless, first she acted, then later thought about the consequences.

*Rav Alpert* explains that this idea lies in the expression *chesed v'emes*, kindness and truth. *Chesed* always precedes truth. One's immediate thought should be to help – with logic and truth to follow after the initial first response. Veritably, *chesed* and *emes* are integrated with one another. It matters, however, from where one begins. If one begins with *chesed*, he might realistically have to demur later on when he discovers that this is all above him. If one begins with *emes*, quite possibly the act of *chesed* which could have initially made a difference would never evolve. There are always "reasons," *cheshbonos*, calculations, for inaction. If this is the case, it is conceivable that there will be neither *chesed* nor *emes*. We should first act and then face the music – later – after we have acted compassionately and saved a life, family, organization.

### Va'ani Tefillah

**השיבנו אבינו לתורתך – חזרה ל'סוראשה' – חזרה ל'סוראשה', Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah.**

People learn Torah for a variety of reasons. For some, it is superficial or might be satisfying to study in the analytical method of the *yeshivos*, *b'derech pilpul*, the hair-splitting, homiletic approach which prevails in *Chassidishe yeshivos*. It could be because one does not want to be viewed as an *am ha'aretz*, unlearned, or because it is part and parcel of being *frum*, observant. After all is said and done, however, how many acknowledge that they are learning Hashem's Torah and that we are studying directly from Him? This is where the *brachah*, *Ha'shivenu Avinu l'Sorachecha* comes in – "Return us to the awareness that the Torah which we are studying is Your Torah." So many learn – but do they realize that it is *Toras Hashem* which they are learning, and that they are actually learning with the Almighty? *Torasecha* – Your Torah: otherwise, it is just course study without real meaning.

לע"נ האשה החשובה  
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נפ כ"א טבת התש"ס  
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מנחם שמואל ורוזע דבורה סלומון  
ע"ה *In memory of Mrs. Toby Salomon*

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## Parashas Shemos

תשע"ז

פרשת שמות

**ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף**

**A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. (1:8)**

When did the Egyptian exile begin? Most would have us think that the *shibud Mitzrayim*, Egyptian exile, commenced with the death of Yosef and his brothers. The Torah records Yosef's passing and immediately adds that a new Pharaoh came into the picture who had no knowledge of Yosef – or the debt of gratitude the country owed him. It would seem that this was the early stirrings of the exile. Surely, during the golden era of Egypt, when Yosef was viceroy in charge of the entire country, exile was the farthest thought from the minds of the people.

*Chazal* do not seem to agree with this hypothesis. In fact, they postulate that the exile did not commence with *chomer u'liveinim*, mortar and bricks, when the Jews were enslaved building pyramids for Pharaoh. It actually began much earlier, specifically during the golden era, when the Jews were satiating themselves from Yosef's beneficence, when they all enjoyed his good fortune. This seems odd. Yosef had exponentially enriched Pharaoh's coffers. The Egyptian population was in his eternal debt. He was the acknowledged savior of the Egyptian people.

The Jewish people lived in seclusion in Goshen, their families growing at an extremely quick pace. Everything seemed to be fine. Yet, the Torah alludes to their being conspicuous, expatriates in a country that supposedly had accepted them with open arms. *Rashi* observes that the usual space break between *Parashas Vayechi* and the preceding *Parsha, Vayigash*, is missing. (A new *parsha* either begins on a new line or is separated from the previous one by at least a nine-letter space.) *Rashi* thus describes *Vayechi* as a *parsha setumah*, closed *parsha*, a condition that is meant to imply something about the mood of Yaakov *Avinu's* children following his passing. At that moment, the hearts of Yaakov's children were "closed," in expectation of the suffering and despair of the coming exile that would follow his death. While the actual physical bondage and persecution did not begin immediately, the spiritual exile had commenced. *Rashi* actually derived this idea from the *Midrash* that states clearly: when Yaakov died, the *shibud* began.

We must say that *Rashi's* use of the phrase, *Nistemu eineihem v'libam shel Yisrael*, "The eyes and hearts of *Yisrael*

became closed," means that, up until this point, as long as Yaakov was alive, he did not permit his offspring – both children and grandchildren – to lose sight of the fact that they were not home, Egypt was *galus* for them. "Do not get comfortable, you do not belong here. This is not your home." He constantly warned them not to get too close to the Egyptians, not to become impressed with all the glitz that represented their lifestyle. Once Yaakov *Avinu* died, however, the Jews' eyes became closed; they were no longer aware that they were in *galus*. They did not see the evil look on the Egyptians' faces. They did not observe the significance of maintaining their own exclusiveness, as they fell prey to the acculturation that was overtaking them. Next came the need to assimilate and be like the Egyptians. After all, were they not all Egyptians?

*Rashi* teaches us that exile does not mean only physical bondage. It refers also (and quite possibly in a greater sense) to spiritual disillusionment and exile. Not realizing that one is in exile is in and of itself the greatest exile. When one is acutely aware that he is not included, viewed as displaced, reviled by the host nation, one is compelled to maintain his separation – which, for a Torah Jew, is a good thing.

**ותיראן המילדת את האלקים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן מלך מצרים ותחיינ את הילדים**

**But the midwives feared G-d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live. (1:17)**

Pharaoh had to stem the tide of the Jewish population explosion. Infanticide was his proposal. He could not prevent conception, but he could see to it that the infants never saw the light of day. The two Jewish midwives feared Hashem and rejected Pharaoh's orders, claiming that, by the time they arrived, the children had already been born. These midwives were, like so many of the other Jewish women, *nashim tzidkaniyos*, righteous women, who placed their commitment to Hashem above everything. Their faith in the Almighty motivated their actions, despite the pressing question: To what kind of world and to what type of life were they bringing these infants? They were helping the mothers give birth to children who would live a life of persecution and slavery, beaten, reviled, starved and eventually murdered. Did they not care about the quality of

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life to which these babies would be subjected?

No! They trusted in Hashem. Their function was to bring the child into the world. Hashem would care for the infant. Life is of infinite value, and even a moment is worth eternity. Furthermore, a Jew measures life according to purpose and value – not quality. If Hashem granted life to these children, then they had purpose. A life with purpose is a life of value. Who were they to decide differently?

Likewise, the righteous women went out to the fields, fed and washed their husbands, giving them hope. Afterwards, the women would return home until it was time to give birth, then, they would return and give birth in the fields under the apple trees. What a beautiful and meaningful practice – but what about the children? Who took care of them? What quality of life would they have? The mothers trusted in Hashem, Whom they knew would take care of the children. These women were righteous Jewesses who understood that every child/*neshamah*/soul that Hashem sends down to this world has a purpose and value that is immeasurable. That in and of itself is the greatest definition of quality of life! A life of purpose and value – that is a life of quality.

Sadly, many are influenced by the secular way of thinking, believing that the quality of life determines if one should be kept alive. A person who is suffering and can no longer be effective, who is miserable and in pain, has no quality of life. Why make him suffer? A baby whose mother is incapable of taking care of him, who is born into a life of poverty and travail, will have no quality of life. So, why bother? *Baruch Hashem*, had these secularists been in Egypt, the saga of the Egyptian exodus might have been different!

Every Jew should know that regardless of his circumstances, he is enjoined to live a life of meaning and purpose, because this is what Hashem demands of him. Otherwise, why would he be here? No one is “just here,” and nothing “just happens.” There is purpose and meaning to all aspects of life. A meaningful story that deserves to be repeated underscores this idea which has been around for a while:

During Menachem Begin’s tenure as Prime Minister, one of his ministers was Shmuel Tamir. While not personally observant, Tamir understood that questions which involve Jewish law have to be ruled on by a Torah scholar of repute. The country was suffering through a severe economic crisis. People were without work, money and even food. A secular Jew immediately wonders how to solve the crises by abrogating *Halachah*. After all, whenever something is not right, it is the fault of the *chareidim*. Tamir felt that abortions would stem the tide of “indiscriminant” births and spare many families the negative effects of the economy. He turned to the venerable *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, *Horav Arye Levin, zl*, an individual who was both loved and revered by Jews of all stripes.

Mr. Tamir presented his case to the *Rav*, asking that abortions should be permitted, so that families could live. *Rav Levin* paused for a moment and responded, “I find it quite interesting that you come to me with this question, because,

years ago, I had a similar decision to render for a young couple. They were both students, parents of one child, a little girl. They had recently found out that another child was on the way. The financial situation at home was beyond desperate. There was no way they could handle another mouth to feed. As Jews, they begged me for a dispensation to end the pregnancy.

“I explained to them that, while I felt for them wholeheartedly, there were nonetheless three reasons why they must see this pregnancy through to completion. First was the firm conviction that Hashem, Who created life, has the ability to sustain it. Your child is His child as well, and He will be there for yours, because it is also His.

“Second, you have the *mitzvah* of *Peru u’revu*, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ The fulfillment of this commandment is achieved when one has a boy and a girl. Third, you are already pregnant and within you already exists a holy soul with a mission in life. Like every one of us here on earth, every *neshamah*, soul, has its individual purpose which the world needs; otherwise, it would not have been created. Do not prevent your child’s mission from achieving fruition – for its sake and for the sake of mankind.”

Disappointed by the *Rav’s* refusal to grant them a dispensation, Tamir asked, “*Nu, Rebbe*, did they listen to you, and did they have the child?” “Yes, they did. They had a little boy,” *Rav Arye* replied.

“And *Rebbe*,” Tamir continued with a touch of sarcasm in his tone, “did the boy fulfill his mission in life?”

*Rav Arye* looked Tamir right in the eyes and said, “This you will have to answer. The people who came to me so many years ago were your parents. You are standing here today only because they chose to follow my *p’sak*, ruling. So, indeed, let me ask you now – did you fulfill your mission?”

We are all here for a reason. What is the reason? Hashem knows, because He created us. Let it suffice to say that He does not create indiscriminately. For whatever reason or purpose God created someone, a person’s life matters – to him, his family, his friends/students, associates, neighbors, the world, but mostly to Hashem. Since one’s life matters to Hashem, he must do everything possible to preserve every second of it. When Hashem decides to call him home, his life will cease – and not one moment earlier.

**ותפתח ומראוהו את הילד והנה נער בכה ותחמול עליו  
She opened it and saw him, the boy, and behold! A youth was crying. She took pity on him. (2:6)**

*Horav Nachman Breslover, zl*, teaches that everything has good and bad, positive and negative, aspects. Tears/crying are/is no different. Some tears emanate from *atzvus*, depression, despair, hopelessness, which are “motivated” by the *sitra acharah*, evil inclination, under the auspices of Satan. In such an instance, a person weeps for something entrenched in the *yetzer hora* – a passion, a desire, something that rightfully does not belong to him. Yet, he seeks to have it – and when Hashem is not forthcoming with filling his *taavah*, desire, he cries bitterly. When Eisav did not obtain his father’s blessing, he

raised his voice and cried. Why did he cry? He had lost his *olam hazeh*, this world. He wanted to fulfill his heart’s desire. He lost out, and now he wept, because he was dejected. His tears emanated from depression.

Not so the tears of the Jewish people. We weep, because we have become distanced from Hashem. Our bitter exile has removed us from His sanctum sanctorum. Our sinful behavior has caused us to move farther and farther away from Hashem. We lost the *Batei Mikdash* and constantly pray for its return. These are noble tears, tears of hope coupled with remorse. We concede our guilt and beg Hashem’s forgiveness.

Our people weep like an infant who cries for its father/mother. This is what is meant by, *V’hinei naar bocheh*; “And behold! A youth was crying,” immediately followed by: *Va’tachmol alav*, “She took pity on him.” We must express our tears of pain and remorse over the sins which by their commission, we have distanced ourselves from our Father in Heaven. Tears have the ability to transform anger into acquiescence, strict judgment into mercy. The tears of *Yisrael* emanate from a source of hope; the tears of Eisav evolve from hopelessness.

What is the source of *bechayah*, weeping? Where did it all begin? When Hashem created the world, the *mayim ha’tachtonim*, lower waters, wept saying, *Anan b’inan l’mihevei kadam Malka*, “We want to be closer to the King.” The lower waters cried, because they were further away from Hashem than were the *mayim ha’elyonim*, upper waters.

Eisav’s tears are tears of *sheker*, falsehood, since they seek only self-gratification. The tears of *Klal Yisrael* are the tears of the Matriarch, Leah *Imeinu*, who cried and cried. Her eyes became soft from weeping, because she feared falling into Eisav’s clutches through marriage. We, too, must weep that we shall not fall into the embrace or clutches of Eisav.

I have written much about the power of tears and how no tear is wasted. Every sincere tear that a Jew sheds is highly valued by Hashem. It has incredible staying properties and is preserved by Hashem for generations until that time that it can be used to help someone in need. There are good stories about the power of tears, many of which have found their way to these pages. Not wanting to be redundant, I looked for what would be a new story for me. I was fortunate to come across an incredible story in an old edition of the *Jewish Observer*.

The story is about a fellow who made a *Siyum* on *Shisha Sidrei Mishnah* in honor of his father’s *yahrtzeit*, on the occasion of the hundredth anniversary of his father’s arrival in America. Today we have no idea of the trials and tribulations, the almost daily spiritual challenges, that the newly arrived European immigrants faced. They came to the *goldeneh medinah*, the golden province, completely unaware that it was also the *treifah medinah*, unholy, unkosher, province. During the *Siyum*, the son, who was now a grown man, himself a *baal teshuvah*, returnee to ritual observance, spoke about his past.

The *goldeneh medinah* had claimed the spiritual lives of his eight siblings. For all intents and purposes, in the words of his

father, they were all *goyim*. As the youngest of his nine children, his father viewed him as his last chance to leave a Jewish legacy. If he lost this son (named Motke/Mordechai) – all would be lost. America had destroyed his family. Motke was approaching his sixteenth birthday, and his father had enrolled him in *yeshivah* college.

On the morning of his sixteenth birthday, Motke gathered together his courage, approached his father, and said, “Poppa, I am not going to *yeshivah* college. I am no longer going to put on *Tefillin* or keep kosher. I have no intention to continue my *Shabbos* observance. I love you dearly and I do not want to hurt you, but I have decided to follow in the footsteps of my brothers and sisters. I, too, will become a *goy*.”

The author writes: “The courage that I had conjured quickly dissipated, as I lifted my hands to protect my face from the slap that was certain to come. Indeed, my father’s eyes blazed, and he took a step forward. Then suddenly he stopped and began to plead with me: ‘Motke, *du bist dehr letzter*; you are the last one. You are my last hope. You are different than your siblings. Do not say what you just said. G-d will forgive you. Please do not mean what you said.’

“My father had never begged. It shocked me to hear him begging me not to turn my back on Judaism. He must really have been hurting, if he did not attempt to hit me. I loved my father so; I could not bear to see him in pain.

“Papa, please do not try to make me become a rabbi. I want to be like all of my friends and everyone else in our family. Judaism does not interest me.’

“So, do not become a rabbi,’ my father asserted. ‘Become an observant Jew; put on *Tefillin*, keep kosher, observe *Shabbos*, but do not become a *goy* like the rest of the family. It is enough for me that I raised eight *goyim*. I do not need to have nine. Motke – Motke – *shoin genug*, it is enough. Please listen to me!’

“Papa burst into bitter weeping. I also burst into tears. We embraced and cried on one another: ‘Papa, Papa, please do not cry, I do not want to hurt you. It makes no sense for me to be *frum*, observant, but I will try.’

“It did not take long for the sixteen-year-old to forget the tears. Yes, they were soon forgotten, as the allure of America with all its glitz and culture beckoned me to join all the other *goyim*. I followed in the path forged by my siblings who had fallen prey to the charm of America.

“Many years went by until those tears came back to haunt me. It was then that I realized how those tears had never given up on me. They became a source of encouragement, reminding me that a Jew never really leaves ‘home.’ I had raised my family in the way I had chosen for myself – completely divorced from the Judaism practiced by my father. Religious observance was a burden that I was not prepared to carry on my shoulders. Certainly, I would not subject my children to such a life.

“Later in life, it was my Shlomo Michael, named for my father, who catalyzed my remembrance of those tears. He had gone to *Eretz Yisrael* on a student trip and, after a while, he wrote to me that he had enrolled and was studying at *Yeshivah*