

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

# Shemot

Exodus 1:1-6:1

Week of January 11--January 17, 2004

The **Children of Israel** multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, **Pharaoh** enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, **Shifrah** and **Puah**, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the **Nile**.

A child is born to **Jocheved**, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, **Amram**, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, **Miriam**, stands watch from afar. **Pharaoh's daughter** discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him **Moses**.

As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the **hardship** of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and **kills** the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews **fighting**; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them - **Zipporah** and becomes a **shepherd** of his father-in-law's flocks.

G-d appears to Moses in a **burning bush** at the foot of **Mount Sinai** and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "**Let My people go, so that they may serve Me.**" Moses' brother, **Aaron**, is appointed to serve as his spokesman. In Egypt,



Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people **believe**; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go, and even intensifies the suffering of Israel.

Moses returns to G-d to protest: "**Why have You done evil to this people?**" G-d promises that the **redemption** is close at hand.

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

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Our Parshah opens by once more listing the names (*she-mot*) of the sons of Jacob who came with him to Egypt, where "the children of Israel were fruitful, and proliferated, and multiplied, and grew very, very strong; and the land was filled with them."

As long as Jacob's sons were alive, the Children of Israel prospered in the land which Joseph had saved from starvation; but after the passing of Joseph and his brothers,

There arose a new king over Egypt, who knew not Joseph. And he said to his people: "Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we."

"Come, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass that when any war should chance, they also join our enemies, and fight against us..."

The Egyptian's way of dealing with their "Jewish problem" was to enslave the Jews. "They made their lives bitter with hard labor, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of work in the field." And yet,

The more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew.

The king of Egypt summons two Jewish midwives, Shifrah and Puah, and commands them to kill all Jewish newborn males. When the midwives defy his instructions,

Pharaoh commanded all his people, saying: "Every son

## Commentary

AND THESE ARE THE NAMES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WHO CAME INTO EGYPT: REUBEN, SHIMON, LEVI, AND JUDAH (EXODUS 1:1-2)

Although G-d had already counted them in their lifetime, He again counted them at the time of their death, to express His love for them. For they are like the stars, which He takes out and brings in by number and name; as it is written (Isaiah 40:26): "He takes out their hosts by number, He calls them each by name."

(Rashi)

AND JOSEPH DIED, AND ALL HIS BROTHERS, AND ALL THAT GENERATION (1:6)

Joseph, who lived 110 years, was the shortest-lived of the brothers; Levi, who lived 137, was the longest-lived. Hence, the enslavement of Israel, which began after Levi's death, was no longer than 116 years (the period from Levi's passing to the Exodus), and no shorter than 86, the age of Miriam at the time of the Exodus (Miriam, meaning "bitterness," was so named on account of the bitterness of the exile).

(Seder Olam)

"Loath positions of authority" (Ethics of the Fathers, 1:10), for they bury those who hold them. Was not Joseph among the youngest of his brothers? Yet he was the first of them to die.

(Avot d'Rabbi Natan)

AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WERE FRUITFUL, AND PROLIFERATED, AND MULTIPLIED, AND GREW VERY, VERY STRONG (1:7)

They would give birth to six at a time (fruitful=1, proliferated=2, multiplied=3, grew strong=4, very=5, very=6).

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

AND THERE AROSE A NEW KING OVER EGYPT, WHO KNEW NOT JOSEPH (1:8)

Some say it was actually a new king; others say, it was the same king with new decrees. "Who knew not Joseph"—who acted as if he did not know Joseph (since, in either case, he surely knew about Joseph and his salvation of Egypt).

(Talmud; Rashi)

LET US DEAL WISELY WITH THEM (1:10)

Pharaoh himself took hold of a basket and shovel; all who saw Pharaoh with a basket and shovel working in bricks, did likewise. The Jews came, too, and diligently worked with him all day, for they were strong and brawny. When evening fell, Pharaoh placed taskmasters over them, and said: "Count how many bricks they made." He then said to the Hebrews: "This number you shall deliver to me each and every day," appointing the Egyptian taskmasters over Hebrew officers and the Hebrew officers over the people.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

THE MORE THEY AFFLICTED THEM, THE MORE THEY MULTIPLIED AND GREW (1:12)

Said Rabbi Akiva: In the merit of the righteous women of that generation were the Israelites delivered from Egypt.

At first, Pharaoh only insisted that they make the prescribed number of bricks each day. Then he commanded that they should not be allowed to sleep in their homes, so that they should not be able to have children. So the taskmasters said to them: "If you go home to sleep, you will lose a few hours each morning from your work, when we send for you, and you will never complete the allotted number." So they made them sleep on the ground out in the field.

What did the daughters of Israel do? They would go down to draw water from the river, and G-d would send them small fish into pitchers, which they

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that is born you shall cast into the River, and every daughter you shall make live."

**The Birth of Moses**

There went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi.

And the woman conceived, and bore a son. And she saw him that he was good; and she hid him three months.

When she could not longer hide him, she took for him a box made of papyrus, and daubed it with clay and with pitch, and put the child in it; and she laid it in the rushes by the River's brink.

The child's older sister, Miriam, stands watch from a distance, "to know what would be done to him."

And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself

at the River. And she saw the box among the rushes, and she sent her maid to fetch it.

She opened it and she saw the child: behold, a weeping boy. And she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the children of the Hebrews."

Miriam approaches and offers the services of a Hebrew nursemaid. When Pharaoh's daughter accepts, Miriam brings Jocheved, the child's own mother, whom Pharaoh's daughter hires to nurse and care for the child. When the child grows older, he is returned to Pharaoh's daughter, who raises him as her son. She calls him Moses, "he who was drawn from the water."

**Flight From Egypt**

And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brothers, and looked on their suffering; and he saw an Egyptian smiting a Hebrew, one of his brothers.

He looked this way and that, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand.

**Commentary**

(Midrash Tanchuma; Talmud, Sotah 11b)

drew up half full of water and half full of fish. They then set two pots on the fire, one for hot water and the other for the fish. They sold the fish and bought wine, which they carried to their husbands in the field, and washed, anointed, fed, gave them to drink. They would then take out their mirrors and look into them with their husbands, teasing them, "Look, I am more beautiful than you" thus arousing their desire and cohabiting with them among the sheepfolds, as it is written: "When ye lie among the sheepfolds" (Psalms 68:14). (It was these mirrors which G-d later commanded Moses to use in the making of the washstand in the Sanctuary — see Exodus 38:8).

After the women had conceived they returned to their homes; and when the time of childbirth arrived, they went and were delivered in the field beneath the apple trees, as it is written: "Under the apple-tree I brought you forth" (Song of Songs 5:5). G-d sent an angel from the high heavens who washed and straightened the limbs [of the babes] in the same manner that a midwife straightens the limbs of a child; as it is said: "And as for your nativity, in the day that you were born your navel was not cut, neither were you washed in water to cleanse you" (Ezekiel 16:4). He also provided for them two round stones, one for oil and one for honey, as it is said: "And He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil from a boulder" (Deuteronomy 32:13).

When the Egyptians noticed them, they went to kill them; but a miracle occurred and [the children] were swallowed in the ground. The Egyptians brought oxen and ploughed over them, as it is said: "The ploughers ploughed upon my back" (Psalms 129:3). After they had departed, they broke through the earth and came forth like the herbage of the field, as it is said: "I caused you to multiply as the bud of the field" (Ezekiel 16:7). When the children had grown up, they came in flocks to their homes. When G-d revealed Himself by the Red Sea, these children recognised Him first, as it is said: "This is my G-d and I will praise Him" (Exodus 15:2).

**THE MORE THEY AFFLICTED THEM, THE MORE THEY MULTIPLIED AND GREW (1:12)**

What is the meaning of the verse (Jeremiah 11:16) in which the Jewish people are called "a leafy olive tree, fair with goodly fruit"? Just as the olive is marked out for shriveling while it is yet on its tree, after which it is brought down from the tree and beaten, and after it has been beaten is brought up to the vat and placed in a grinding-mill, where it is ground and then tied up with ropes, and then stones are brought, and then at last it yields its oil, so it is with Israel: the heathens come and beat them about from place to place, imprison them and bind them in chains, and surround them with officers, and then at last do Israel repent and G-d answers them.

(Midrash Rabbah)

**PHARAOH COMMANDED ALL HIS PEOPLE, SAYING: "EVERY SON THAT IS BORN YOU SHALL CAST INTO THE RIVER" (1:22)**

He imposed the same decree upon his own people. Said Rabbi Yose ben Rabbi Chaninah: He made three decrees. First, [he instructed the midwives,] "If it be a son, then you shall kill him"; then he commanded, "Every [Hebrew] son that is born you shall cast into the river"; and finally, "Pharaoh commanded all his people," imposing the same decree upon his own people.

(Talmud, Sotah 12a)

**EVERY SON THAT IS BORN YOU SHALL CAST INTO THE RIVER, AND EVERY DAUGHTER YOU SHALL MAKE LIVE (1:22)**

Pharaoh did not merely allow the Jewish girls to live; he commanded to "make them live" (techayun, in the Hebrew).

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But not only Egyptians were doing the smiting. The next day, Moses encounters two Jews fighting. "Why will you smite your fellow?" he demands of the attacker.

"Who made you prince and a judge over us?" comes the reply. "Do you say to kill me, as you killed the Egyptian?"

And Moses feared, and said: "Indeed, the thing is known."

Moses' fear materializes: word reaches Pharaoh, and Moses is sentenced to death. Moses flees to the land of Midian.

In Midian, Moses sits by a well. The daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian, come to draw water for their father's

flocks and are driven away by shepherds; Moses comes to their aid. Moses is subsequently invited to Jethro's home, and marries one of the daughters, Zipporah. A son is born to them and named Gershom, "Because I was a stranger (*ger*) in a foreign land".

In the meantime, the lot of the Children of Israel in Egypt worsens, "and their cry rose up to G-d out of their bondage."

## At the Burning Bush

Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro; and he led the flock far away into the desert, and came to the mountain of G-d, to Horeb.

And the angel of G-d appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thornbush; and he looked, and behold, the bush burned with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

## Commentary

Pharaoh's decree of annihilation against the Jewish people consisted of two parts: to throw every Jewish newborn male into the Nile, and to make live every female. The boys were to be physically murdered. The girls were to be murdered spiritually by making them live the Egyptian life, by indoctrinating them into the perverse lifestyle of Egypt.

The boys were to be drowned in the Nile. The girls, too, were to be drowned in the Nile - conceptually, if not actually. The Nile, which irrigated the fields of rain-parched Egypt, was the mainstay of its economy and its most venerated god. The girls were to be raised in this cult of the river, their souls submerged in a way of life that deifies the earthly vehicle of material sustenance.

In our own day, the Pharaoh-instituted practice of drowning children in the Nile is still with us: there are still parents whose highest consideration in choosing a school for their children is how it will further their child's economic prospects when the time will come for him or her to enter the job market.

The people of Israel survived the Egyptian galut because there were Jewish mothers who refused to comply with Pharaoh's decree to submerge their children in his river. If we are to survive the present galut, we, too, must resist the dictates of the current Pharaohs. We must set the spiritual and moral development of our children rather than their future "earning power" and "careers" as the aim of their education.

*(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)*

THERE WENT A MAN OF THE HOUSE OF LEVI, AND TOOK TO WIFE A DAUGHTER OF LEVI (2:1)

Where did he go? He went in the counsel of his daughter.

Moses' father, Amram, was the greatest man of his generation; when he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed "Every son that is born you shall cast into the river," he said: In vain do we labor. He went and divorced his wife. All the Israelites thereupon arose and divorced their wives.

Said his daughter to him: "Father, your decree is more severe than Pharaoh's. Pharaoh decreed only against the males; you have decreed against the males and females. Pharaoh only decreed concerning this world; you have decreed concerning this world and the World to Come. In the case of the wicked Pharaoh there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not; in your case, it will certainly be fulfilled." So Amram went and remarried his wife; and they all arose and took back their wives.

"And he took to wife" it should have read "and he took back"! Said Rabbi Judah ben Zebina: He acted towards her as though it had been the first marriage. He seated her in a palanquin, Aaron and Miriam danced before her, and the Ministering Angels proclaimed: "A joyful mother of children."

Why is she called "a daughter of Levi"? She was one hundred and thirty years old! Because the signs of maidenhood were reborn in her.

*(Talmud, Sotah 12a)*

AND SHE SAW HIM THAT HE WAS GOOD (2:2)

At the time when Moses was born, the whole house was filled with light. For it is written here, "And she saw him that he was good," and elsewhere it is written (Genesis 1:4), "And G-d saw the light that it was good."

*(Talmud, Sotah 12a)*

AND SHE LAID IT IN THE RUSHES BY THE RIVER'S BRINK (2:3)

Why did she put Moses in the River? So that Pharaoh's astrologers should think that he has already been cast into the Nile, and not search for him.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

[PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER] SAW THE BOX AMONG THE RUSHES, AND SHE SENT HER MAID ("AMMATAH") TO FETCH IT (2:5)

Another interpretation of this verse renders the Hebrew word ammatah as "her arm" rather than "her maid." Ammatah also means "arm lengths." This is to teach us that "her arm was extended for many arm-lengths" (to enable her to reach the basket).

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And Moses said: "I must turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."

And G-d called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said: "Moses! Moses!" And he said, "Here I am."

And He said: "Do not come near; remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground."

"I am the G-d of your father, the G-d of Abraham, the G-d of Isaac, and the G-d of Jacob."

And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon G-d.

And G-d said: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cries at the hand of their oppressors, I know their pain..."

"Come now therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh, that you shall bring My people the children of Israel out of Egypt."

"Who am I," objects Moses, "that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

"I will be with you," answers G-d, and tells Moses the ultimate goal of the Exodus: "When you bring the people out of Egypt, you shall serve G-d upon this mountain" (upon which the people of Israel will receive the Torah).

Says Moses: "When I come to the Children of Israel, and say to them, 'The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you,'"

## Commentary

(Talmud; Rashi)

If Moses' basket lay beyond her reach, why did Pharaoh's daughter extend her arm? Could she possibly have anticipated the miracle that her hand would be "extended for many arm-lengths"?

There is a profound lesson here for each and every one of us. Often, we are confronted with a situation that is beyond our capacity to rectify. Someone or something is crying out for our help, but there is nothing we can do: by all natural criteria, the matter is simply beyond our reach. So we resign ourselves to inactivity, reasoning that the little we can do won't change matters anyway.

But Pharaoh's daughter heard a child's cry and extended her arm. An unbridgeable distance lay between her and the basket containing the weeping infant, making her action seem utterly pointless. But because she did the maximum of which she was capable, she achieved the impossible. Because she extended her arm, G-d extended its reach, enabling her to save a life and raise the greatest human being ever to walk the face of the earth.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

SHE OPENED IT AND SHE SAW THE CHILD: BEHOLD, A WEEPING BOY. AND SHE SAID, "THIS IS ONE OF THE CHILDREN OF THE HEBREWS" (2:6)

She saw him weeping, but did not hear him; thus she knew it was a Hebrew child. For only a Jew can weep soundlessly.

(Rabbi Bunim of Otwoztk)

AND SHE CALLED HIS NAME MOSES (2:10)

From here you can infer how great is the reward of those who perform acts of kindness. For although Moses had many names, the name by which he is known throughout the Torah is the one which Batyah, the daughter of Pharaoh, called him, and even G-d called him by no other name.

(Midrash Rabbah)

HE WENT OUT TO HIS BROTHERS, AND LOOKED ON THEIR SUFFERING (2:11)

He saw great burdens put upon small people and light burdens upon big people, and a man's burden upon a woman and a woman's burden upon a man, and the burden which an old man could carry on a youth, and of a youth on an old man. So he left his suite and rearranged their burdens, pretending all the time to be helping Pharaoh. G-d then said to him: "You have put aside your affairs and have gone to share the sorrow of Israel, behaving to them like a brother; I too, will leave those on high and below and speak only with you."

Moses saw that they had no rest, so he went to Pharaoh and said: "If one has a slave and he does not give him rest one day in the week, the slave dies." Said Pharaoh: "Go and do with them as you say." Thereupon Moses ordained for them the Sabbath day for rest.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND HE LOOKED THIS WAY AND THAT, AND WHEN HE SAW THAT THERE WAS NO MAN (2:12)

He saw that there was no hope that any righteous person would arise from him or his offspring until the end of generations.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND HE SLEW THE EGYPTIAN (2:12)

How did he slay him? Rabbi Abyatar said: With his fist. Others say that he took a clay shovel and cracked his skull. The Rabbis say that he pronounced G-d's name against him and thus slew him; thus [the Hebrew he saw fighting the next day] said to him, "Do you say to kill me?"

(Midrash Rabbah)

TWO MEN OF THE HEBREWS FIGHTING (2:13)

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they will say to me: 'What is His name?' What shall I say to them?"

And G-d said to Moses: "I am who I am." And He said: "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: **Eheyeh** ('I am') has sent me to you."

G-d then gives Moses detailed directions on how to proceed and how the Exodus will come about:

Go and gather the elders of Israel together, and say to them: "G-d, the G-d of your fathers, has appeared to me, saying: I have surely remembered ("pakod pakadati") you, and have seen that which is done to you in Egypt. And I have said: I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanite, to a land flowing with milk

and honey."

And they will hearken to your voice. And you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt, and you shall say to him: "G-d, the G-d of the Hebrews has met with us; and now let us go, we entreat you, three days' journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to G-d..."

And I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go, not by a mighty hand. And I will stretch out My hand and smite Egypt with all my wonders which I will do in their midst, and after that he will let you go.

And when you go, you shall not go empty: every woman shall ask of her neighbor, and of her that sojourns in her house, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and garments and you shall despoil Egypt.

But they won't believe me that You indeed appeared to me, says Moses. G-d responds by giving him a number of supernatural "signs" to perform: Moses' staff turns into a serpent and back to a stick; his hand becomes covered with leprosy, and is miraculously healed. If these two

## Commentary

These were Datan and Aviram (who were yet to cause much trouble for Moses - see Exodus 16:20 and Numbers 16).

(Rashi)

AND HE SAID TO THE WICKED ONE: "WHY WOULD YOU SMITE YOUR FELLOW?" (2:13)

Said Resh Lakish: He who lifts his hand against his fellow, even if he did not smite him, is called wicked; as it is written: "And he said to the wicked one: Why would you smite your fellow?" It does not say, "Why did you smite," but, "Why would you smite," indicating that though he had not smitten him yet, he was termed a "wicked one."

(Talmud, Sanhedrin 58b)

AND MOSES FEARED, AND SAID: "INDEED, THE THING IS KNOWN" (2:14)

Moses was meditating in his heart: "In what have Israel sinned, that they should be enslaved more than all the nations?" When he heard their words, he said: "Tale-bearing is rife among them, and how can they be ripe for salvation?" Thus he proclaimed, "Indeed the thing is known"—now I know the cause of their bondage.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

AND MOSES DWELLED IN THE LAND OF MIDIAN; AND HE SAT BY A WELL (2:15)

He took his example from Jacob, who found his wife by the well.

(Rashi)

AND THE PRIEST OF MIDIAN HAD SEVEN DAUGHTERS; AND THEY CAME TO WATER THEIR FATHER'S FLOCK (2:16)

Jethro was at first a priest to idolatrous worship; but when he saw that there was no truth in it, he summoned his townsmen and said: "Hitherto I minis-

tered unto you, but now I have become old; choose another priest." And he returned unto them all the insignia of his priesthood. Whereupon they excommunicated him, that no man be in his company, or work for him or tend his flock; he asked the shepherds to look after his flock, but they refused, and he had to employ his daughters.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND IT CAME TO PASS IN THE COURSE OF THOSE MANY DAYS, THAT THE KING OF EGYPT DIED; AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL GROANED BY REASON OF THE BONDAGE (2:23)

He didn't actually die, but was afflicted with leprosy, and his physicians said to him that his only cure is to slaughter Hebrew children—150 in the morning and 150 in the evening—and bath in their blood twice a day.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL GROANED BY REASON OF THE BONDAGE (2:23)

Until this point, the Children of Israel were so deeply sunk in their galut that they could not even sense it. But now, when the first budding of their redemption began to emerge, they could begin to feel the depth of their suffering.

(Chidushei HaRim)

AND MOSES WAS SHEPHERDING THE SHEEP OF JETHRO (3:1)

G-d tests the righteous. How does He try them? With sheep.

He tried David through sheep and found him to be a good shepherd, as it is written (Psalms 77:70), "He chose also David His servant, and took him from the sheepfolds." As a shepherd, David would bring the smallest sheep out first, so that they should graze upon the tender grass; then he allowed the old sheep to feed from the ordinary grass; lastly, he brought forth the young, lusty sheep to eat the tougher grass. Whereupon G-d said: He who knows how to look after sheep, bestowing upon each the care it deserves,

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signs do not suffice, says G-d, take water from the Nile, and it will turn to blood.

Moses has a further objection: "O my G-d, I am not a man of words, also not yesterday, also not the day before, also not since You have spoken to Your servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue."

To which G-d responds:

*"Who has made man's mouth? Who makes a man dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I G-d? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you should say."*

Still, Moses persists in his refusal to take on the mission of redeeming Israel from exile. "O please, my G-d!" he cries. "Send by the hand of him whom you shall send!"

*And the anger of G-d burned against Moses, and He said: "Is not Aaron the Levite your brother? I know that he can speak well. Behold, he comes to meet you, and when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart; he shall be your spokesman to the people*

*"And you shall take this staff in your hand, with which you shall perform the signs."*

**"Let My People Go"**

Moses places his wife and sons on "the donkey" and sets out for Egypt. On the way, he is nearly killed when they stop for the night; his life is spared only when Zipporah circumcises their son.

G-d appears to Aaron and sends him to the desert to meet Moses. In Egypt, the brothers assemble the elders of Israel. Aaron conveys the message of redemption from G-d, and Moses performs the signs. "And the people believed."

*After that, Moses and Aaron came and said to Pharaoh: "Thus says G-d, G-d of Israel: Let My people go, that they may observe a festival for Me in the wilderness."*

**Commentary**

shall come and tend my people.

Also Moses was tested by G-d through sheep. Our Rabbis relate that when Moses was tending the flock of Jethro in the wilderness, a little kid escaped from him. He ran after it until it reached a shady place. When it reached the shady place, there appeared to view a pool of water and the kid stopped to drink. When Moses approached it, he said: "I did not know that you ran away because of thirst; you must be weary." So he placed the kid on his shoulder and walked back. Thereupon G-d said: Because you were merciful in leading the flock of a mortal, you shall tend My flock, the people of Israel.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

**AND HE CAME TO THE MOUNTAIN OF G-D, TO HOREB (3:1)**

The mountain had five names: The Mountain of G-d, Mount Bashan, the Mountain of Peaks, Mount Horeb, and Mount Sinai.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

**AND THE ANGEL OF G-D APPEARED TO HIM IN A FLAME OF FIRE OUT OF THE MIDST OF A THORNBUSH (3:2)**

Why in a thornbush and not some other tree? In order to demonstrate that "I am with them in their affliction."

*(Rashi)*

**THE BUSH BURNED WITH FIRE, BUT THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED (3:2)**

Moses had thought to himself that the Egyptians might consume Israel. So G-d showed him a fire which burned but did not consume, saying to him:

"Just as the thornbush is burning and is not consumed, so the Egyptians will not be able to destroy Israel."

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

At Sinai, Moses beheld the heart of the simple Jew.

"Man is a tree of field." (Deuteronomy 20:19). But the field has many types of trees. The Talmud compares the righteous Torah scholars to fruit trees, which bestow beauty, fragrance and nourishment upon the world. The fruit trees also burn — they burn with the ecstasy of their Torah study, with the fervor of their prayer, with the warmth of their good deeds. But theirs is a fire that burns and burns out, a fire that is sated by the words of Torah and prayer and the fulfillment of the divine will.

But the thornbush burns with a fire that is never satisfied. The simple Jew, who cannot fathom the depths of Torah, who can barely articulate his prayers, who has little understanding of the significance of a mitzvah — his is a thirst never quenched. His heart burns with a yearning for G-d he can never hope to still, with a love he can never hope to consummate.

When Moses, the most perfect of men, beheld the heart of flame that smolders within the thornbush, he was humbled by the sight. "I must turn aside to see this great sight," he said: I must move from where I am and strive to awaken in myself the insatiable fire of the simple Jew.

*(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)*

**AND G-D CALLED TO HIM OUT OF THE MIDST OF THE BUSH: "I AM THE G-D OF YOUR FATHER" (3:4-6)**

G-d first called to Moses in the voice of Amram his father, so as not to startle him. At that moment Moses rejoiced, saying, "My father still lives." Said G-d: "I am not your father, but the G-d of your father."

## PARSHAH SUMMARY &amp; COMMENTARY

## Shemot

Exodus 1:1-6:1

Torah Reading for week of January 11-17, 2004

And Pharaoh said: "Who is G-d, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I know not G-d, nor will I let Israel go."

Not only does Pharaoh refuse their demand—he increases the burden of labor on his Hebrew slaves, commanding their taskmasters:

"You shall no longer give the people straw to make brick, as before: let them go and gather straw for themselves. But the quantity of the bricks, which they did make heretofore, you shall lay upon them; you shall not diminish naught of it."

## Commentary

(Midrash Tanchuma)

AND MOSES HID HIS FACE; FOR HE WAS AFRAID TO LOOK UPON G-D (3:6)

Rabbi Joshua ben Korchah and Rabbi Hoshaia discussed this. The first said: Moses did not do well in hiding his face, for had he not done so, G-d would have revealed to him what is above and what is below, what has happened and what will happen.

Rabbi Hoshaia the Elder said: Moses did well in hiding his face. Said G-d to him: Since you showed Me respect and hid your face when I would show Myself to you, I assure you that you will be near Me on the mountain for forty days and forty nights, in which you will not eat nor drink, but feast on the splendor of the Divine Presence.

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND MOSES SAID TO G-D: "WHO AM I, THAT I SHOULD GO TO PHARAOH?" AND HE SAID: "THIS IS YOUR SIGN THAT I HAVE SENT YOU" (3:11-12)

This itself—your humility—is the reason why I have chosen you.

(Amei Azel)

The story is told of two brothers, both disciples of the Rebbe of Lublin, who served as Chassidic rebbes. One enjoyed a large following, while the other had few disciples.

Said the second brother to the first: "I don't understand. We are both disciples of our late master; we are both equally great in learning and piety; so why do so few Chassidim come to me, while so many seek you out?"

Replied the other: "I, too, ask the same question: Why do they come to me instead of to you? But it seems, my brother, that in both our cases, our question is also the answer. They don't come to you because you can't understand why they don't come to you; and they come to me because I can't understand why they come to me."

(Maayanah Shel Torah)

And G-d said to Moses: "I am who I am." And He said: "Thus shall you say to the children of Israel: 'I am' has sent me to you" (3:14)

When the Jewish officers complain to Moses that his visit to Pharaoh has only made things worse, he can bear it no longer:

And Moses returned to G-d and said: "My G-d, why have You done evil to this nation?! Why have You sent me?!"

"For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done worse to this nation; and You have not saved Your people"

And G-d said to Moses: "Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh; for with a strong hand shall he let them go, and with a strong hand shall he drive them out of his land."

G-d said to Moses: "Go and say to Israel: 'I am' with you in this servitude, and 'I am' with you in the servitude of the other kingdoms."

Said Moses to G-d: "Master of the Universe! It is enough that they deal with each trouble in its time!" (I.e., why speak to them now of their future subjugations?)

Said G-d: "You have spoken well. Go and tell them: 'I am' has sent me to you."

(Talmud; Rashi)

G-d said to Moses: You want to know My name? I am called by My deeds. I might be called E-I Sha-dai, or Tzevakot, or Elokim, or HaVaYaH. When I judge My creatures, I am called Elokim. When I wage war on the wicked, I am called Tzevakot. When I tolerate the sins of man, I am called E-I Sha-dai. When I have compassion on My world, I am called Ha-Va-Ya-H..."

(Midrash Rabbah)

AND G-D SAID TO HIM "CAST [YOUR STAFF] ON THE GROUND" AND IT TURNED INTO A SNAKE... AND HE PUT HIS HAND INTO HIS BOSOM AND HIS HAND WAS LEPROUS, AS WHITE AS SNOW (4:2-6)

G-d was indicating to Moses that he acted wrongly in saying that the people of Israel will not believe. The snake is an allusion to the primordial serpent, who was punished for his evil talk; leprosy is the punishment for slander.

(Midrash; Rashi)

Man was created to do, achieve and create. If his hand is indolently resting in his bosom, it is dead flesh.

(Malbim)

"I AM SLOW OF SPEECH, AND OF A SLOW TONGUE" (4:10)

When Moses was a child in the royal palace Pharaoh would take him on his lap to kiss and hug him, and Moses used to take the crown of Pharaoh and place it upon his own head.

The magicians of Egypt sat there and said: "We fear that this is the one of whom we prophesy that he will take away the kingdom from you." Some of them counseled to slay him and others to burn him, but Jethro was pres-

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ent among them and he said to them: "This boy has no sense. However, test him by placing before him a gold vessel and a live coal; if he stretches forth his hand for the gold, then he has sense and you can slay him, but if he makes for the live coal, then he has no sense and there can be no sentence of death upon him." So they brought these things before him, and he was about to reach forth for the gold when the angel Gabriel came and thrust his hand aside so that it seized the coal; Moses thrust his hand with the live coal into his mouth, so that his tongue was burnt, with the result that he became slow of speech and of tongue.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

Moses was afflicted with a speech impairment so that no one should think that his success in transmitting the Torah to the world was due to his oratory skills. Rather, it derived solely from the fact that "the divine presence spoke from his throat."

*(Derashot HaRan)*

AND MOSES SAID TO G-D: "O MY G-D, I AM NOT A MAN OF WORDS, ALSO NOT YESTERDAY, ALSO NOT THE DAY BEFORE, ALSO NOT SINCE YOU ARE SPEAKING TO YOUR SERVANT..." (4:10)

For seven days G-d was persuading Moses at the bush to go in His mission. "Yesterday," "the day before" and "since You are speaking" are three days; three times "also" indicate another three days; thus Moses was standing on the seventh day when he said "O please, my G-d! Send by the hand of him whom you shall send!"

*(Rashi)*

"O PLEASE, MY G-D! SEND BY THE HAND OF HIM WHOM YOU SHALL SEND!" (4:13)

Said Moses: I know that I am not destined to take them into the Land and to be their Future Redeemer. You have other messengers—send them!

*(Rashi)*

AND THE ANGER OF G-D BURNED AGAINST MOSES; AND HE SAID: "IS NOT AARON THE LEVITE YOUR BROTHER?" (4:14)

Rabbi Joshua ben Karchah said: A lasting effect is recorded of every instance of divine anger in the Torah, but no lasting effect is recorded in this case.

Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai said: A lasting effect is recorded in this instance too, for it says, "Is there not Aaron the Levite your brother?" But wasn't Aaron a Kohen (priest)? However, originally Moses was to be the Kohen and Aaron the Levite, and their roles were reversed.

*(Talmud, Zevachim 102b)*

AND WHEN [AARON] SEES YOU, HE WILL BE GLAD IN HIS HEART (4:14)

Not, as you thought, that he would be jealous of your ascension to the leadership. In the merit of this, Aaron was granted the Choshen (priestly breastplate) worn on the heart.

*(Rashi)*

AND YOU SHALL TAKE THIS STAFF IN YOUR HAND, WITH WHICH YOU SHALL DO THE SIGNS (4:17)

This staff was created at twilight of the sixth day of creation and was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. Adam gave it to Enoch, Enoch to Noah, Noah to Abraham, Abraham to Isaac and Isaac to Jacob. Jacob brought it with him to Egypt and gave it to Joseph. When Joseph died his house was despoiled and the staff ended up in Pharaoh's palace. Jethro, who was one of Pharaoh's soothsayers, saw the staff with the mysterious markings on it and coveted it; he took it and planted it in the garden of his home, and no man was able to come close to it.

When Moses came to Jethro's house, he entered the garden and saw the staff and read the markings on it; he reached out his hand and plucked it from the ground. When Jethro saw this, he proclaimed, "This man shall redeem the people of Israel from Egypt," and gave him his daughter Zipporah as a wife.

*(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 40)*

AND MOSES TOOK HIS WIFE AND HIS SONS AND SET THEM UPON THE DONKEY, AND HE RETURNED TO THE LAND OF EGYPT (4:20)

This is the very donkey which Abraham saddled for the Binding of Isaac, and this is the very donkey upon which the Messiah is destined to be revealed, as it is written (Zechariah 9:9), "A pauper, riding upon the donkey."

*(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer; Rashi)*

AND IT CAME TO PASS ON THE WAY THAT G-D MET HIM AND SOUGHT TO KILL HIM. ZIPPORAH TOOK A SHARP STONE AND CUT OFF THE FORESKIN OF HER SON, AND CAST IT AT HIS FEET (4:24-25)

Because Moses was lax in circumcising his (second) son, Eliezer, an angel came to kill him.

*(Rashi)*

Jethro had made this a condition of his marriage with Zipporah - that half their sons would be circumcised, and the other half would not.

*(Midrash Agadah)*

AND G-D SAID TO AARON: "GO TO THE WILDERNESS TO MEET MOSES." AND HE WENT, AND MET HIM IN THE MOUNT OF G-D, AND KISSED HIM (4:27)

This is what the verse (Psalms 85:11) refers to when it says, "Benevolence and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed." "Benevolence" this is Aaron; "truth" this is Moses. "Righteousness" is Moses; "peace" is Aaron.

*(Midrash Rabbah)*

And the people believed; and they heard that G-d had remembered the children of Israel (4:31)

The people of Israel were redeemed from Egypt only in the merit of their faith, as it is written, "And the people believed."

*(Mechilta)*

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## Shemot

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When Moses said to G-d, "But they will not believe me," G-d said to him: They are believers, the children of believers, whereas you will ultimately disbelieve. They are believers, as it is written, "And the people believed"; they are the children of believers, as it is written (Genesis 15:6), "and [Abraham] believed in G-d"; and you will ultimately disbelieve, as it is written (Numbers 20:12): "And G-d said to Moses and Aaron: Because you believed not in Me"

(Talmud, Shabbat 97a)

The letters (which held the secret of the redemption) were given over only to Abraham; Abraham gave them over to Isaac, Isaac gave them to Jacob, and Jacob to Joseph. Joseph transmitted them to his brothers, while Asher the son of Jacob handed them down the secret to his daughter Serach.

When Moses and Aaron came and performed the miraculous signs before the elders of Israel, the elders went to Serach and said to her: "A man has come and performed such and such signs."

Said she to them: "These signs don't mean anything."

Said they to her: "But he said, pakod pakadati ('I have surely remembered')."

Said she to them: "This is the man who will redeem the people of Israel from Egypt."

(Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, ch. 40)

## AFTER THAT, MOSES AND AARON CAME AND SAID TO PHARAOH (5:1)

Where had the elders gone? They are not mentioned here, though G-d had said to Moses, "And you shall come, you and the elders of Israel, to the king of Egypt."

Our Sages explained that the elders did indeed go with them, but stole away furtively, singly or in pairs, so that by the time they reached the palace of Pharaoh, not one of them was there.

For this reason, when Moses and Aaron went up with the elders to Mount Sinai to receive the Torah, G-d turned them back, as it says (Exodus 24:14): "And unto the elders he said: Wait here for us."

(Midrash Rabbah)

## AND PHARAOH SAID: "WHO IS G-D?" (5:2)

That day was Pharaoh's day for the reception of ambassadors, when all the kings came to pay him honor, bringing with them gifts of crowns with which they crowned him lord of the world, and also their idols did they bring with them.

After they had crowned him, Pharaoh's servants came and said: "Two old men are at the gate."

When Moses and Aaron entered, Pharaoh asked them, "Who are you?"

"We are the ambassadors of G-d, blessed be He."

"What do you want?"

"Thus says G-d, G-d of Israel: Let My people go, that they may observe a festival for Me in the wilderness."

"Has he not the sense to send me a crown, that you come to me with mere words? Wait, while I search in my records."

Pharaoh went into his palace chamber and scrutinized every nation and its gods, beginning with the gods of Moab, Ammon, and Zidon. He then said to them: "I have searched for his name throughout my archives, but have not found him. Is he young or old? How many cities has he captured? How many provinces has he subdued? How long is it since He ascended the throne?"

(Midrash Rabbah)

And the king of Egypt said to them: "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, distract the people from their work? Go off to your labors" (5:4)

It was the custom for every nation to have its clergy, the teachers of its faith. For this reason, Pharaoh absolved the tribe of Levi from forced labor, recognizing them as the sages and elders of the Jewish people... Thus Pharaoh said to Moses and Aaron "Go off to your labors," as the enslavement of the Jewish people in Egypt did not include the tribe of Levi.

(Nachmanides)

And the officers of the children of Israel, whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had set over them, were beaten, saying: Why have you not fulfilled your quota in making brick? (5:14)

These Israelite officers were worthy men who jeopardized their lives for Israel, bearing the blows of the Egyptians so that Israel's task might be lighter. For this merit they were subsequently endowed with the holy spirit, as G-d later instructs Moses (Numbers 6:16): "Gather unto Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people, and officers over them." Said G-d: Since they were beaten for Israel's sakes, therefore they will merit the holy spirit and be appointed as prophets over them.

(Midrash Rabbah)

And they said to [Moses and Aaron]: "you have made us abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (5:21)

They said to Moses: "To what are we compared? To a lamb which a wolf comes to devour, and then a shepherd comes to wrest it from the jaws of the wolf. Between the shepherd and the wolf, the lamb is torn in two." Thus did Israel say: Moses, between you and Pharaoh, we are dying.

(Midrash Rabbah)

## AND G-D SAID TO MOSES: "NOW YOU SHALL SEE WHAT I WILL DO TO PHARAOH (6:1)

G-d said to Moses: Because you questioned My ways, "Now you shall see"—what is now done to Pharaoh you will witness, but you will not live to see what I will do to the kings of the Seven Nations when I bring Israel into the Land.

(Rashi; Talmud, Sanhedrin 111a)

## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi  
Menachem M. Schneerson*

### Moses: The Birth of a Leader

The Parshah of Shemot is the story of a galut - of the exile and enslavement of the Children of Israel in Egypt, which our sages regard as the father and prototype of all subsequent exiles and persecutions of the Jewish people. It is also the story of the making of the quintessential Jewish leader, Moses.

Everything the Torah tells us about Moses is a lesson in Jewish leadership. We are told that Moses' mother, Jocheved, was born "between the boundary walls" of Egypt when Jacob's family first arrived there. This, explains the Lubavitcher Rebbe, means that Jocheved belongs neither to the "old generation" born in the Holy Land, to whom galut will always be a foreign and unknowable world; nor is she of the generation born in Egypt, to whom the state of exile is a most natural and obvious fact of life. Rather, she straddles both these worlds, meaning that she has intimate knowledge of the circumstance of galut as well as the transcendent vision to supersede it. So Jocheved is the woman in whose womb could be formed, and under whose tutelage could develop, the one who could redeem the Children of Israel from their exile.

The circumstances of Moses' birth are a lesson in the selflessness demanded of the leader. Jocheved and Amram had separated when Pharaoh decreed that all newborn Hebrew males be cast in the Nile. Their eldest daughter, Miriam, rebuked them: "Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's: Pharaoh decreed to annihilate the males, and your action shall spell the end of all Jewish children." Amram and Jocheved realized that, as leaders whose actions will be emulated by others, they had to rise above the personal danger and anguish involved in fathering Jewish children in these terrible times. The result of their remarriage was the birth of Moses.

#### Infancy and Childhood

When Moses is born, the "house was filled with light" attesting to his future as the enlightener of humanity. But right away this light has to be hidden, for he, as all Hebrew newborn males, lives in perpetual fear of discovery by Pharaoh's baby killers. Then he is placed in the Nile, precar-

iously protected only by a reed basket, sharing, if only in potential, the fate of his fellow babes cast into its waters.

Here we have a further lesson in leadership: the leader cannot appear from "above," but must share the fate of his people. This was the lesson which G-d Himself conveyed by first appearing to Moses in a thornbush: "I am with them in their affliction."

But Moses' placement in the Nile was not only a demonstration of empathy with the plight of Israel: it was also the first stage of their salvation. Our sages tell us that Pharaoh ordered all Hebrew male babies to be cast into the Nile because his astrologers told him that the savior of Israel will meet his end by water (this prediction was fulfilled many years later when Moses was prevented from entering the Holy Land because of the "Waters of Strife"). On the day that Moses was placed in the Nile, Pharaoh's astrologers informed him that the one destined to redeem the people of Israel has already been cast into the water, and the decree was revoked. As a three-month-old infant, seemingly a passive participant in the events surrounding him, Moses was already fulfilling his role as a savior of his people.

Thanks to Miriam's ingenious ploy, Moses is nursed and raised by his own mother in his early childhood. But then he is brought to Pharaoh's palace to be raised as a member of the royal family. Moses must be both Hebrew slave and Egyptian prince. To lead his people, he must share their fate; to defeat the forces that enslave them, he must infiltrate the citadel of Egyptian royalty. He must "come into Pharaoh" (Exodus 10:1) and gain intimate knowledge of the essence of his power and vitality.

#### Defender of Israel

The first of Moses' actions to be explicitly recounted by the Torah delineate two central tasks of the leader: to defend his people from external threat, and to safeguard their internal integrity.

On the day that Moses attains adulthood, he "goes out to his brothers" and "sees their affliction" - his years in Pharaoh's palace have not inured him against affinity with this tribe of Hebrew slaves and sensitivity to their plight. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew to death. He is compelled to act, sacrificing, with this single action, his privileged life as a member of the ruling class and binding his fate to that of his brethren.

The very next day Moses acts again, this time to intervene in a quarrel between two Jews. Seeing two of his

## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

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brethren in conflict, he suddenly comprehends that the source of their enslavement is not the power of Egypt, but their own internal disunity, and that the key to their redemption lies in fostering a sense of mutual interdependency and responsibility among the members of the fledgling nation of Israel.

From these two demonstrations of leadership one would expect Moses to proceed directly to his ordained role as leader of Israel. But first he had to become a shepherd.

### The Faithful Shepherd

For the role of a leader in Israel is not only to defend, redeem, preach and govern, but also and primarily, to nurture. Moses is the savior of Israel and their teacher and legislator, but also their *raaya meheimna* - their "faithful shepherd" and "shepherd of faith" - meaning that he is the provider of their needs, both materially and spiritually, feeding their bodies with manna and feeding their souls with faith.

So Moses is driven from Egypt to faraway Midian to become a shepherd of Jethro's sheep. The Midrash relates how another shepherd, David, learned the art of leadership by caring for his father's flocks: he would have the small kids graze first on the tender tips of grass before allowing the older sheep and goats to feed on the middle portion of the stalks, and only afterwards releasing the strong, young rams to devour the tough roots. A leader cannot simply point the way and a teacher cannot simply teach; he must "shepherd" his flock, supplying to each guidance and knowledge in a manner that can be absorbed and digested by its recipient.

The Midrash also tells how, one day, a kid ran away from the flock under Moses' care. Moses chased after it, until it came to a spring and began to drink. When Moses reached the kid he cried: "Oh, I did not know that you were thirsty!" He cradled the runaway kid in his arms and carried it to the flock. Said the Almighty: "You are merciful in tending sheep - you will tend My flock, the people of Israel."

The Lubavitcher Rebbe points out that in addition to demonstrating Moses' compassion, the incident holds another important lesson: Moses realized that the kid did not run away from the flock out of malice or wickedness - it was merely thirsty. By the same token, when a Jew alienates himself from his people, G-d forbid, it is only because he is thirsty. His soul thirsts for meaning in life, but the waters of Torah have eluded him. So he wanders about in foreign

domains, seeking to quench his thirst.

When Moses understood this, he was able to become a leader of Israel. Only a shepherd who hastens not to judge the runaway kid, who is sensitive to the causes of its desertion, can mercifully lift it into his arms and bring it back home.

### The Ultimate Sacrifice

After many years of leadership in the making, the stage is set. He was a Hebrew baby cast into the Nile, an infant at Jocheved's breast, a young Egyptian prince, a fearless defender of his people, an equally fearless campaigner of Jewish unity, a shepherd in the wilderness. Then G-d revealed Himself to him in a burning bush to say: I have seen the affliction of My people, I have heard their cries, I know their sorrows. I'm sending you to redeem them. Go, take them out of Egypt, and bring them to Mount Sinai for their election as My chosen people.

Most amazingly, Moses refuses to go.

He doesn't just refuse - for seven days and seven nights he argues with G-d, presenting every conceivable excuse to decline his commission, until "G-d's anger burned against Moses."

First came the excuse of humility: "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"

G-d ends all debate along those lines with the words: "I will be with you." Can even "the humblest man on the face of the earth" plead unworthiness after that?

But I don't know Your essence, says Moses. How can I present myself as a messenger when I can't explain the nature of the One who sent me?

So G-d tells him who He is.

They won't believe me when I say that G-d sent me.

G-d rebukes Moses for slandering His people. Yes, they will believe you. Whatever else you say about them (and there's lots to say), they are believers. But if you're not convinced of their faith, here's a few magic tricks you can perform.

Moses' excuses are running out. He tries: But I have a speech impairment. A leader needs to give speeches, you

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know.

G-d's answer is so obvious it doesn't need repeating.

So Moses finally just cries: O please, my G-d, don't send me. "Send by the hand of him whom You shall send."

Why, indeed, is Moses acting so strangely? His brothers and sisters are languishing under the taskmaster's whip; Pharaoh is bathing in the blood of Jewish children. The moment for which the Children of Israel have hope and prayed for four generations has finally come: G-d has appeared in a burning bush to say, "I am sending you to redeem My people." Why does Moses refuse? Out of humility? Because he's not a good speaker?

Our sages interpret the words, "Send by the hand of him whom You shall send," to mean: send by the hand of him whom You shall send in the end of days, Moshiach (the Messiah), the final redeemer of Israel.

The Chassidic masters explain that Moses knew that he would not merit to bring Israel into the Holy Land and thereby achieve the ultimate redemption of his people. He knew that Israel would again be exiled, would again suffer the physical and spiritual afflictions of galut (if Moses himself would have brought the Children of Israel into the Holy Land and built the Holy Temple, they would never have been exiled again and the Temple would never have been destroyed, since "all Moses' deeds are eternal"). So Moses refused to go. If the time for Israel's redemption has come, he pleaded with G-d, send the one through whom You will effect the complete and eternal redemption. For seven days and nights Moses contested G-d's script for history, prepared to incur G-d's wrath upon himself for the sake of Israel.

(This extreme form of self-sacrifice, in which Moses jeopardizes his very relationship with G-d for the sake of his people, was to characterize Moses' leadership throughout his life. When the people of Israel sinned by worshipping the Golden Calf, Moses said to G-d: "Now, if You will forgive their sin---; and if You will not, blot me out of the Book which You have written.")

Nor did Moses ever accept the decree of *galut*. After assuming, by force of the divine command, the mission to take Israel out of Egypt, he embarked on a lifelong struggle

to make this the final and ultimate redemption. To the very last day of his life, Moses pleaded with G-d to allow him to lead his people into the Holy Land; to his very last day he braved G-d's anger in his endeavor to eliminate all further galut from Jewish history. In Moses' own words: "I beseeched G-d... Please, let me cross over and see the good land across the Jordan, the good mountain (Jerusalem) and the Levanon (the Holy Temple). And G-d grew angry with me for your sakes... and He said to Me: Enough! Speak no more to Me of this matter..." (Deuteronomy 4:23-26).

Says the Lubavitcher Rebbe: G-d said "Enough!" but Moses was not silenced. For Moses' challenge of the divine plan did not end with his passing from physical life. The Zohar tells us that every Jewish soul has at its core a spark of Moses' soul. So every Jew who storms the gates of heaven clamoring for redemption continues Moses' struggle against the decree of *galut*.

## Name and Number

*And these are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt... Reuben, Simon, Levi, Judah... And all the souls descendent of Jacob were seventy...*

Exodus 1:1-4

*Although [G-d] had already counted them in their lifetime (i.e., in Genesis 46), He again counted them at the time of their death, to express His love for them. For they are like the stars, which He takes out and brings in by number and name; as it is written (Isaiah 40:26): "He takes out their hosts by number; He calls them each by name."*

Rashi

Counting and naming are among love's most powerful expressions. Listen to a child counting his candies, or to a beloved's name on the lips of a lover, and you will know what it means to cherish and revere.

The number and the name retain their poignancy where love's more "passionate" signals no longer apply -- or never did. A hug or a kiss are meaningless unless its recipient can sense it and respond. But the act of counting will express our affection also for inanimate objects, and the utterance of a name will trigger a rush of feeling long after its bearer has

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departed from our world.

As the book of Exodus opens, the twelve sons of Jacob - a fledgling nation's link to the lives of their founding fathers -- have passed on, and the Jewish people are entering their first galut, a 210-year period of exile and spiritual displacement. At this point, the Almighty re-affirms his bond with his people by counting and naming them. G-d is saying: even if the trials to come will deaden your response to Me, my love for you will not falter.

**Two Faces of Israel**

The count and the name relate to two different -- even opposite -- aspects of their subject.

Numbers are the ultimate equalizer. The statement "and all the souls descendent of Jacob were seventy" attributes to each an equal standing in the total count. Each of these souls is a unique individual, with his own particular strengths and weaknesses. But in counting them, we underscore their common denominator: the basic fact of their being. On this level, each of the seventy count for no more and no less than "1".

Names, of course, connote the very opposite of commonality. The name identifies, individualizes, distinguishes. This is especially true in the Torah, where names are given to individuals and places to express their unique characteristics and identify their specific function and role.

Throughout the long and bitter galut of Egypt, G-d kept loving watch over both these faces of Israel. He counted the quintessence of our being, the indestructible core of the Jewish soul. And He named the growing thousands of expressions of this essence, as translated into thousands and then millions of individual lives.

## The Brick Factory

As the Torah tells the tale, before they could become a people chosen by G-d as His "light unto the nations," the children of Israel had to first undergo the "smelting pit of Egypt." For 210 years they were "strangers in a land that is not

theirs," the last eighty-six of which they were inducted into forced labor by the Egyptians, primarily in the manufacture of bricks.

Why bricks? Nothing is incidental in G-d's world, particularly in the history of His people. If we were forged as a nation at the brick kilns of Egypt, then the brick is significant to our mission in life.

**Stones and Bricks**

The human being is a builder. Some of us build physical structures -- homes, cities, roads, hi- or low-tech machines, and a host of other useful (or useless) objects. Others engage in more metaphysical construction, structuring words, pigments or sounds so that they house ideas or feelings. And we all build a life, forging materials from our environment, our society and our own psyche into an edifice that serves a certain function and aim.

Endowed by our Creator with free choice, we might make this a material or spiritual aim, a selfish or altruistic one, a positive or negative one; or we can make it the ultimate aim of building what the Midrash calls "a dwelling for G-d" by devoting our life to the fulfillment of G-d's will as revealed in the Torah.

The materials we use fall under two general categories: G-d-given and man-made. Many of the "materials" out of which what we build our lives were already here when we arrived on the scene, ready for use, or with their potential implicit in it, awaiting discovery and realization. But G-d empowered us to do more than simply develop His world. Desiring that we become His "partners in creation" (as the Talmud expresses it), He imparted to us the ability to create potential where no such potential exists.

Therein lies the deeper significance of the "bricks" we molded and fired as we matured as a people.

The book of Genesis (in chapter 11) describes the invention of the brick: Originally, the survivors of the Flood inhabited mountainous regions, and quarried stone as a building material; but then they settled in the valley of Shinar (later Babylon), where they desired to build "a city and a tower whose head reached to the heavens." Where would they find a material strong enough for such a massive structure? Someone had an idea: "They said one to the other, 'Let us mold bricks, and bake them with fire.' And the brick served them as stone, and clay served them as mortar" (Genesis 11:3).

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The "stone" represents those materials with which G-d provides us to build our lives. Not that man needn't toil -- the stone must be hewn from the mountain, transported, cut into shape, and fitted with many others for a structure to be raised. But the stone is there, solid and fit for the task, awaiting development. In our personal lives, this represents those elements that are naturally qualified to serve as part of a "home for G-d" and readily lend themselves to this end: our positive character traits, the sacred times and places in creation (e.g. the twenty-four hours of Shabbat, the Holy Land), objects and forces designated for the performance of a mitzvah (e.g. a Torah scroll, a pair of tefillin).

Then there are those elements that are as qualified a building material as raw clay: our selfish and animalistic instincts, and a material world that obscures the truth of its Creator. Elements that, by nature, are inconducive, or even contrary, to anything good and G-dly. To include these elements in the dwelling for G-d we make of our lives, we must forge bricks: knead and mold them into a shape they have never known, fire them in the kiln of self-sacrifice and love of G-d, until they become as solid and supportive as the sacred stones in our edifice.

## I Am

*I Am who I Am*

Exodus 3:14

*I Am with you in your present distress, and I shall be with you in future exiles and persecutions*

Rashi on verse

When G-d appeared to Moses in the burning bush and charged him with the mission to take the people of Israel out of Egypt, Moses said to the Almighty:

"Behold, I will come to the children of Israel and say to them, The G-d of your fathers has sent me to you, and they will say, 'What is his name?' What shall I say to them?"

G-d replied to Moses: "I Am who I Am... Tell the children of Israel, I Am (Eh-he-yeh) has sent me to you."

## An Anonymous G-d?

To name something is to describe and define it. So G-d, who is infinite and undefinable, cannot be named. Thus G-d has no name, only names -- descriptions of the various behavior patterns that can be ascribed to His influence on our lives. In the words of the Midrash, "G-d said to Moses: You want to know My name? I am called by My deeds. I might be called E-l Sha-dai, or Tzevakot, or Elokim, or Ha-Va-Ya-H. When I judge My creatures, I am called Elokim. When I wage war on the wicked, I am called Tzevakot. When I tolerate the sins of man, I am called E-l Sha-dai. When I have compassion on My world, I am called Ha-Va-Ya-H..."

Therein lies the deeper significance of the question that Moses anticipated from the children of Israel. What is His name? they were sure to ask. What type of behavior are we seeing on the part of G-d in these times? You say that G-d has seen the suffering of His people in Egypt, has heard their cries, and knows their pain, and has therefore sent you to redeem us. Where was He until now? Where was He for the eighty-six years that we are languishing under the slave-drivers whip, that babies are being torn from their mothers arms and cast into the Nile, that Pharaoh is bathing in the blood of Jewish children? What name is He now assuming, after eighty-six years in which He has apparently been nameless and aloof from our lives?

## G-dly, But Not Holy

As explained above, each of the divine names describes another of the attributes by which G-d has chosen to relate to His creation: Elokim describes G-d's assumption of the attribute of Justice, Ha-Va-Ya-H His assumption of Compassion, and so on. Eh-he-yeh ("I am"), the name by which G-d here identifies Himself to Moses, connotes G-d's assumption of Being and Existence.

This is why there is some question amongst the Halachic authorities as to whether the name Eh-he-yeh should be counted among the seven holy names of G-d. Torah law forbids erasing or defacing G-d's name, for the very ink and paper (or other medium) assume a holiness by virtue of its representation of something that relates to the divine. While there are many names and adjectives that describe G-d's many-faceted involvement with His creation, there are seven primary divine names to which the strictest provisions of this law apply. Yet despite the fact that many Kabbalists consider Eh-he-yeh to be the loftiest of divine names, it is not included in certain versions of the seven-name list as it appears in the Talmud and the Halachic works;

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indeed, the final Halachic conclusion is that it is not one of the seven holy names.

The reason for this paradox is best understood by understanding the meaning of the term "holiness". What makes something holy? Holy (kadosh in the Hebrew) means transcendent and apart. G-d is holy, for He transcends our earthly reality; Shabbat is a holy day, for it is a day of withdrawal from the mundanity of the everyday; a Torah scroll or a pair of tefillin are holy because these are objects that have visibly transcended their material state to serve a G-dly end.

The same applies to the seven holy divine names: each describes a divine activity that goes beyond the mundane norm, a divine intervention in reality -- G-d as ruler, G-d as judge, G-d as provider, G-d as savior, etc. On the other hand, Eh-he-yeh ("I am") is G-d as being -- G-d as the essence of reality.<sup>2</sup> So Eh-he-yeh is beyond holiness. If holiness is a feature of G-d's transcendence, the beingness of G-d transcends holiness itself, describing a dimension of divine reality that pervades every existence even as it transcends it, and thus relates equally to them all, holy and mundane alike.

[Nevertheless, Eh-he-yeh is a name -- that is, an assumed behavior pattern -- of G-d's. The very phenomenon of "existence" is part and parcel of G-d's creation, and G-d certainly cannot be defined by something He created. Ultimately, G-d can be described as a "being" or "existence" only in the sense that we speak of Him as a provider or ruler: these are mere names, describing not His essence but a certain perception He allows us to have of Him by affecting our reality in a certain manner.]

**The Answer**

This was G-d's answer to the people's outcry, "What is His name?!"

Tell the children of Israel, said G-d to Moses, that My name is Eh-he-yeh. Where was I all these years? With you. I am being, I am existence, I am reality. I am in the groan of a beaten slave, in the wail of a bereaved mother, in the spilled blood of a murdered child. Certain things must be, no matter how painful and incomprehensible to your human selves, in order that great things, infinitely great and blissful things, should be. But I do not orchestrate these things from some distant heaven, holy and removed from your existential pain. I am there with you, suffering with you, praying for redemption together with you.

If you cannot see Me, it is not for My ethereality; it is because I am so real.

## The Numerology of Redemption

*And Moses said to G-d: "Who am I, that I might go to Pharaoh, and that I might take the children of Israel out of Egypt? ... Please, my Lord, send by the hand of he whom You will send."*

Exodus 3:4-4:13

*"Send by the hand of he whom You will send" -- by the hand of Moshiach, who is destined to be revealed.*

Midrash Lekach Tov on Exodus 4:13

Our sages state that "the first redeemer, he is the final redeemer." This is not to say that Moses, who delivered the Jewish people from their first exile, and Moshiach, who will bring about the final redemption, are the same person. Moses was from the tribe of Levi, while Moshiach is identified as a descendent of King David, from the tribe of Judah. Rather, it means that the redemption achieved by Moses is the source for the redemption by Moshiach.

The purpose of the Exodus, as G-d told Moses when He revealed Himself to him in the burning bush, was that "when you take this nation out of Egypt, you will serve G-d at this mountain" -- that the Jewish people should receive the Torah at Mount Sinai. The final redemption represents the full and ultimate implementation of the Torah, G-d's "blueprint for creation," in the world. Thus, "the first redeemer, he is the final redeemer" -- Moses' Torah is the essence of Moshiach's perfect world.

Yet when Moses begged that G-d send Moshiach and make the Exodus the first and final redemption, G-d did not accept his plea. First the Jewish people must be taken out of Egypt and given the Torah -- a task that only Moses can achieve. Then they can embark on their mission to "perfect the world as the kingdom of G-d" via the Torah, until its ultimate realization through Moshiach.

**Two Shades of One**

The relationship between Moses and Moshiach is reflected in the numerical value of their names. (In the Holy

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Tongue each letter is also a number, so that a word is also a string of numbers; the sum of these numbers is the word's numerical value, or gematria. The gematria of a word represents a deeper stratum of significance than its linguistic meaning, so the fact that two different words have the same numerical value indicates that they are variant expressions of the same truth.) The numerical value of "Mosheh" (Moses) is 345, and that of "Moshiach," 358. So the difference between Moses and Moshiach is represented by the number 13; otherwise stated, Moses + 13 = Moshiach.

Thirteen is the numerical value of echad, a word that is the keystone of the Jewish faith. Every morning and evening of his life, the Jew recites the verse *Shema Yisrael, Ado-nai Elo-hei-nu, Ado-nai echad* -- "Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is *echad*." The Jewish people are called "an *echad* nation on earth" because they reveal the *echad* of G-d in the world. And the era of Moshiach is described as "the day that G-d will be *echad*, and His name *echad*."

*Echad* means "one." The Shema proclaims the oneness and unity of G-d, which the people of Israel are charged to reveal in the world, and which will be fully manifest in the era of Moshiach. But is echad the ideal word to express the divine unity? Like its English equivalent, the word does not preclude the existence of other objects (as in the sequence "one, two, three..."), nor does it preclude its object being composed of parts (we speak of "one nation," "one forest," "one person" and "one tree," despite the fact that each of these consists of many units or components). It would seem that the term *yachid*, which means "singular" and "only one," more clearly expresses the "perfect simplicity" of G-d (which Maimonides atates to be the most fundamental principle of the Jewish faith) and the axiom that "there is none else beside Him" (Deuteronomy 4:35).

Chassidic teaching explains that, on the contrary, *echad* represents a deeper unity than *yachid*. *Yachid* is a oneness that cannot tolerate plurality -- if another being or element is introduced into the equation, the *yachid* is no longer *yachid*. *Echad*, on the other hand, represents the fusion of diverse elements into an harmonious whole. The oneness of echad is not undermined by plurality; indeed, it employs plurality as the ingredients of unity.

As one Chassidic thinker once put it, G-d did not have to create a world to be *yachid*. He was singularly and exclusively one before the world was created, and remains so after

the fact. It was to express His echad-ness that He created the world, created man, granted him freedom of choice, and commanded him the Torah. He created existences that, at least in their own perception, are distinct of Him, and gave them the tools to bring their lives into utter harmony with His will. When a diverse and plural world chooses, by its own initiative, to unite with Him, the divine oneness assumes a new, deeper expression -- G-d is *echad*.

**The Limits of Revelation**

Moses plus *echad* equals Moshiach.

Moses revealed the divine wisdom and will to man. But this was a revelation, a burst of light from Above. It was not something the world understood or agreed with, but something imposed upon it by the force of a higher truth. It was a display of the divine *yachid*, of the exclusive, all-obliterating reality of G-d.

Moses wanted that G-d should send Moshiach to take the Jewish people out of Egypt -- that the Exodus should lead to the inculcation of the divine echad in the world. But an *echad*-oneness, by definition, must come from below, when a diverse world chooses, by its own initiative, to merge into an integral whole. Moses could provide the key, the formula -- but the process had to unfold in the course of the thirty-three centuries in which the world absorbed the divine truth and implemented the divine will.

In the words of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi: "The era of Moshiach ... is the culmination and fulfillment of the creation of our world -- it is to this end that it was created... In the future [world of Moshiach], the light of G-d will be revealed without any obscuring garment, as it is written: 'No longer shall your Master be shrouded; your eyes shall behold your Master'...

"A semblance of this was already experienced on earth at the time that the Torah was given, as it is written: 'You have been shown to know that the L-rd He is G-d, there is none else beside Him' ... [But] then their existence was literally nullified by the revelation, as our sages have said, 'With each utterance [the people of Israel heard from G-d at Mount Sinai], their souls flew from their bodies...' Yet in the end of days the body and the world will be refined, and will be able to receive the revelation of the divine light ... via the Torah."

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## Moshiach's Donkey

*And Moses took his wife and children, set them upon the donkey, and returned to the land of Egypt*

Exodus 4:20

The prophet Zechariah describes Moshiach as "a pauper, riding on a donkey." The simple meaning of the verse is that Moshiach -- whom the Midrash describes as "greater than Abraham, higher than Moses, and loftier than the supernal angels" (Yalkut Shimoni after Isaiah 52:13) -- is the epitome of self-effacement. Indeed, humility is the hallmark of the righteous: they recognize that their tremendous talents and achievements, and the power vested in them as leaders, are not theirs but their Creator's. They live not to realize and fulfill themselves, but to serve the divine purpose of creation.

On a deeper level, Moshiach's donkey represents the essence of the messianic process: a process that began with the beginning of time and which constitutes the very soul of history. In the beginning, the Torah tells us, when G-d created the heavens and the earth, when the universe was still empty, unformed, and shrouded in darkness, the spirit of G-d hovered above the emerging existence. Says the Midrash: "'The spirit of G-d hovered' -- this is the spirit of Moshiach." For Moshiach represents the divine spirit of creation -- the vision of the perfected world that is G-d's purpose in creating it and populating it with willful, thinking and achieving beings.

Moshiach's donkey has a long, prestigious history. Time and again it makes its appearance through the generations, surfacing at key junctures of the messianic process. Each time we see it fulfilling the same function, but in a slightly different manner -- reflecting the changes our world undergoes as it develops toward its ultimate state of perfection.

### Abraham, Moses, and Moshiach

Moshiach's donkey first appears in the year 2084 from creation (1677 bce), as Abraham heads for the "Binding of Isaac", his tenth and greatest reiteration of his faith in G-d. "Abraham rose early in the morning and readied his donkey," the Torah relates (Genesis 22:3), and loaded it with supplies for the Binding (the wood, the fire, and the knife) for the

three-day trek from Hebron to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

Seven generations later, Moses was also dispatched on a mission by G-d: to take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to Mount Sinai, where I shall communicate to them their mission in life as My chosen people. So "Moses took his wife and children, set them upon the donkey, and set out for Egypt." *The donkey*, stresses the Torah -- the very same donkey, our sages explain, that served Abraham and that will bear Moshiach.

Abraham, Moses and Moshiach -- three who employ this erstwhile donkey in their fulfillment of G-d's will. But the extent to which the donkey is involved in their mission differs. With Abraham, it carries his supplies; with Moses, his wife and children; while Moshiach is described as himself riding the donkey.

### The Rescinded Decree

Conventional wisdom has it that the spiritual is greater than the physical, the ethereal more lofty than the material. Nevertheless, our sages have taught that G-d created the entirety of existence, including the most lofty spiritual worlds, because "He desired a dwelling in the lower world." Our physical existence is the objective of everything He created, the environment within which His purpose in creation is to be realized.

G-d desired that we refine and elevate the material existence; that the physical reality, whose concreteness and self-centeredness obscure our inner vision and distort our true priorities, be redirected as a positive force in our lives; that we bring to light the goodness and perfection inherent in all of His creation, including -- and especially -- the lowliest of His works, the material world.

The Hebrew word for donkey is *chamor* from the word *chomer*, material. Moshiach's donkey is the material beast harnessed, the physical directed to higher and loftier ends.

But humanity's mission of elevating the material entails a long and involved process, an historic effort in which each generation builds upon the attainments of its predecessors. For the physical and the spiritual are worlds apart; indeed, the very nature of G-d's creation is such that a vast gulf divides the two, making them natural antagonists. By nature, almost by definition, a person devoted to spiritual pursuits shuns the material, while material life coarsens a person's soul and dulls his or her spiritual sensitivity. Only when G-d descended on Mount Sinai was the wall between spirit and matter breached. The divine reality revealed itself within the earthly reality; the Torah was given to man, enabling him to

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sanctify the mundane, to express the all-pervading truth of G-d within, and via, the material world.

The Midrash uses the following parable to explain the significance of the event:

*Once there was a king who decreed: "The people of Rome are forbidden to journey to Syria, and the people of Syria are forbidden to journey to Rome." Likewise, when G-d created the world He decreed: "The heavens are G-d's, and the earth is given to man" (Psalms 115:16). But when He wished to give the Torah to Israel, He rescinded His original decree, and declared: "The lower realms may ascend to the higher realms, and the higher realms may descend to the lower realms. And I, Myself, will begin" -- as it is written, "And G-d descended on Mount Sinai," and then it says, "And to Moses He said: 'Go up to G-d'."*

This explains the difference in the extent to which Abraham and Moses involved the material donkey in their respective missions. Abraham, the first Jew, began the process of sublimating the material, of realizing its potential to express the goodness and perfection of the Creator. But Abraham lived before the revelation at Sinai, before G-d rescinded the decree that had divided the world between higher and lower, between matter and spirit. In his day, the original order instituted at creation still held sway: the physical and the spiritual were two separate, incompatible worlds. The most Abraham could do was to harness the physical to serve the spiritual, to use the donkey to carry the accessories of his divine service. The physical remained as coarse as ever and could not directly be involved in his spiritual life; nevertheless, Abraham took the first step in wresting the material from its inherent self-absorption by utilizing it, albeit peripherally, to assist in his service of G-d.

Moses, on the other hand, was embarking on the mission that was to culminate in his receiving the Torah, the medium by which G-d empowered man to dissolve the dichotomy between the higher and lower domains. The Torah instructs and enables us to sanctify even the most mundane aspects of our lives, to integrate our material selves and environment in our spiritual goals. So Moses used the donkey to carry his wife and children. A person's wife and children are an exten-

sion of his own self -- in the words of our sages, "a person's wife is like his own body" (Talmud, Berachot 24a) and "a child is a limb of his father" (ibid., Eruvin 70b). Beginning with Moses, the material began to play a central and intimate role in our life's work.

But Moses marks only the beginning of Torah's effect on the physical world. Ever since, whenever a person uses a material resource to perform a mitzvah -- e.g. giving money to charity, using the energy his body extracts from his food to fuel his fervor in prayer -- he "refines" these physical objects, divesting them of their mundanity and selfishness. With each such act, the physical world becomes that much holier, that much more in harmony with its essence and function. Each such act brings closer the day when our world will finally and completely shed the husk of coarseness that is the source of all ignorance and strife, bringing on a new dawn of universal peace and perfection.

So Moshiach, who represents the ultimate fulfillment of Torah, himself rides the donkey of the material. For he heralds a world in which the material is no longer the lower or secondary element, but an utterly refined resource, no less central and significant a force for good than the most spiritual creation.

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, adapted by Yanki Tauber*

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## Freud's Great Freudian Slip

*By Rabbi Dr Jonathan Sacks*

It was Freud's greatest Freudian slip, and for some reason his commentators, at least those I've read, haven't noticed it.

It appears in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, a strange work if ever there was one. It was published in 1939, by which time Freud had taken refuge in Britain. Had he stayed in Vienna, heaven knows what humiliations he would have suffered before being murdered along with his fellow Jews. For some reason, at this desperate time, Freud wrote a book (he originally described it as a "historical novel") in which he tried to prove that Moses was an Egyptian. There have been many speculations as to why he wrote it, and I have no wish to add to their number. Early on in the book, though, there is a most curious episode.

Freud notes that several scholars have identified a common theme in stories about the childhood of heroes. The hero's birth is fraught with danger. As a baby, he is exposed to the elements in a way that would normally lead to death -- sometimes by being placed in a box and thrown into the water. The child is rescued and brought up by adoptive parents. Eventually, he discovers his true identity. It is a story told about Sargon, Gilgamesh, Oedipus, Romulus and many others. It is also the story of Moses.

At this point, however, Freud notes that in one respect the story of Moses isn't like the others at all. In fact, it's the opposite. In the conventional story, the hero's adoptive parents are humble, ordinary people. Eventually he discovers that he is actually of royal blood, a prince. In the Moses story, the reverse is the case. It is his adoptive family that is royal. He is brought up by the daughter of Pharaoh. His true identity, he discovers, is that he belongs, by birth, to a nation of slaves.

Freud saw this and then failed to see what it meant. Instead he changed tack and concluded that the story is a fabrication designed to conceal the fact that Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he really was a prince of Egypt. What Freud failed to realize is that the story of Moses is not a myth but an anti-myth. It takes a myth and turns it upside down.

Its message is simple and revolutionary. True royalty -- the Bible suggests -- is the opposite of our conventional wisdom. It isn't privilege and wealth, splendor and palaces. It's moral courage. Moses, in discovering that he is the child of slaves, finds greatness. It's not power that matters, but the fight for justice and freedom. Had Moses been an Egyptian prince, he would have been eminently forgettable. Only by being true to his people and to G-d did he become a hero.

Freud had mixed feelings about his own identity. He admired Jews but was tone-deaf to the music of Judaism. That is why, I suspect, he failed to see that he had come face to face with one of the most powerful moral truths the Bible ever taught. Those whom the world despises, G-d loves. A child of slaves can be greater than a prince. G-d's standards are not power and privilege. They are about recognizing G-d's image in the weak, the powerless, the afflicted, the suffering, and fighting for their cause. What a message of courage Freud might have sent his people in that dark night! Let us at least see what he did not, that the story of Moses is one of the great narratives of hope in the literature of mankind.

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## FROM THE CHASSIDIC MASTERS

### Why?

by Yanki Tauber

It's probably the oldest question in the history of human thought. It's surely the most disturbing, the most frequently asked and the least satisfactorily answered: Why, oh why, do bad things happen to good people?

Everyone asks the question: philosophers, theologians, butchers, bakers and candlestick-makers. No one really answers it. The Bible devotes the 41 chapters of the Book of Job to the subject, offering several interesting explanations only to refute them all, the conclusion being that finite man cannot fathom the ways of G-d.

For most, the protest against evil is something that rises out of one's own encounters with the rough spots of life. To a true leader who feels the pain of his people as his own, it is a bottomless cry issuing from the seemingly bottomless well of human suffering.

It didn't take long for Moses to issue that cry. Shortly after G-d appeared to him in a burning bush to appoint him liberator of Israel, Moses was back.

And Moses returned to G-d and said: "My G-d, why have You done evil to this people?! Why have You sent me?! For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done worse to this nation; and You have not saved Your people!" (Exodus 5:22-23).

And what does G-d say? Hold on just a little longer and you'll see that it all turns out right at the end. Encouraging words, especially when coming from G-d Himself; but still no answer for the ultimate Question.

Was it a failing on the part of Moses that he protested G-d's way of doing things? A cursory reading of the Talmudic and Midrashic expositions on Moses' dialogue with G-d would suggest that it was. Moses is criticized for not measuring up to the unquestioning faith of the Patriarchs; by some accounts, he is even punished for his outburst.

But a fundamental rule of Torah scholarship is that "the Torah does not speak negatively even of an impure animal" unless there is a positive, constructive lesson to be derived. To what end does the Torah tell us about Moses' "failing"?

Some would say that this is to teach us that even great men such as Moses can experience doubt and despair. The Lubavitcher Rebbe, however, takes a different approach. Moses' protest to G-d, says the Rebbe, was not a breach of faith, but an act of faith of the highest order.

Indeed, the question/protest/outcry, "Why have You done evil to Your people?!" can issue only from the mouth of a true believer. The non-believer, too, may be outraged by the cruelty and suffering our world abounds with, but just who is he outraged at? The blind workings of fate? The oblivious and apersonal god of physical law and evolutionary process? The random arrangement of quarks that make up the universe?

Even people who believe in G-d are not necessarily driven to confront Him as Moses did. They may not believe that He is truly responsible for all that transpires in the world. They may not be convinced of His ultimate goodness. They may think that it's pointless to protest to Him, since He doesn't really care how they feel about it. Or maybe everything's just fine in their lives, and what's happening to the rest of the world just doesn't concern them.

The true believer, on the other hand, knows that everything that happens happens only because it is ordained from Above. He knows that G-d is the essence of good and that only good flows from Him. And he also knows that man can talk to G-d and expect a response to his entreaties. So he cannot but cry out: "My G-d, why have You done evil to Your people?!"

This is what we must learn from Moses. We must speak to G-d, confront Him, ask Him: Why is there evil and suffering in Your world? We do not know enough to comprehend the answer; we must, however, believe and care enough to ask the question.

*By Yanki Tauber, based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe*