

BS"D Parashat Vayera 5784

The Transformation from Moses to Moshe Rabbeinu

Last week's parashat Shemot ends with Moshe emotionally complaining to HaShem for sending him to Paro to demand the release of the Jewish slaves; the result of which only angered Paro more, increasing their torment and suffering.

This week's parasha Va'ai'ra begins with HaShem castigating Moshe for speaking out of turn.

Question: Was Moshe correct in voicing his grievances over the failed result of his missions?

I will return to this.

Shemini Atzeret (October 7, 2023): The Pogrom on the Jews Living Close to Gaza

In order to understand what happened on that grievous day when Israel's technically advanced security system was so easily breached, and 1400 Jews were brutally tortured and massacred, one has to understand the two parshiot Shemot and Va'ai'ra.

The Emancipator

When the God of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov sent his beloved Jews into slavery, He had already set the scene for their future emancipation and the personalities who would be

empowered with its implementation.

The emancipator would have to possess three characteristics:

- 1- An affiliation with the Jewish people (which leaves out an Egyptian).
- 2- He would have to be immune and invulnerable to the pomp and elegance of the royal court.
- 3- He would have to be able to admonish and castigate Paro without fear that it might cost him his life.

Enter the episode of the child Moshe. He was placed among the reeds of the river, found by princess Batya, returned to his mother Yocheved to be nursed, and at two years old was returned to Batya to raise him as a prince in the palace “under the nose” of the ruthless Paro.

The next time we encounter Moshe he is eighty years old. From the Midrashim we learn that Moshe filled important positions in the Egyptian government, including many outside of the land of Egypt. It would be logical to say that Moshe was aware of his Jewish background but was consciously an Egyptian.

Parashat Shemot relates that “one day” Moshe set out from the palace to inspect the outlying regions removed from the capital. He saw an Egyptian taskmaster smiting a Hebrew slave. Moshe was seized with wrath, killed the Egyptian, and escaped to the land of Midian.

Questions:

1. Why was Moshe shocked by the sight of an Egyptian smiting a Jew? Did he not know that millions of Jews were being beaten daily?
2. If Moshe believed that he behaved properly in killing the Egyptian, why did he not bring the matter before Paro, instead choosing to flee the country?

3. Was it just a “coincidence” that in Midian Moshe found himself in Yitro’s home, among in the vast expanses of Midian?
4. In the miraculous episode of the burning bush that was not consumed, our sages say that for seven days and nights Moshe was commanded to return to Egypt to intervene in the violation of the Jews’ “human rights” and Moshe refused. Is that possible?
5. How did it happen that Moshe could come and go from Paro’s palace as he pleased? What is more, how could it be that Moshe severely rebuked Paro in an insulting manner, yet Paro did not lift a finger to punish him?
6. In Moshe’s first encounter with Paro upon his return from Midian, he warned the King: “I have told you to let My son (Am Yisrael) go and serve Me. If you refuse to let him leave, I will [ultimately] kill your own first-born son” (Shemot 4:23). Yet isn’t it a fact that Paro had no first-born son, with the nearest thing to it being Moshe himself!

I suggest:

Moshe, as Paro’s adopted grandson, was heavily ensconced in Egyptian culture. He had studied in excellent military and civilian academies, and all the “right people” in Egypt wanted to “rub elbows” with him.

We can assume that Amram and Yocheved, his biological and halachic parents did not receive visitation rights to teach Moshe the rudiments of Judaism, as it had been received from Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya’akov. Moshe was brought up as the beloved son of Batya and grandson of Paro and many in the royal court were probably aware of his Hebraic background.

Out of his love for Moshe, Paro distanced him from the harsh reality of the Egyptian regime that enslaved millions of Jews

under heinous conditions. He had further appointed Moshe to run "his household" so Moshe would concentrate totally on the palace and royal court and not on what was happening outside. He did not want Moshe to wake up one morning and discover that his beloved grandfather Paro, was the "Commandant of Dachau".

Between Shemot 2:10, in which Batya adopts Moshe as a son, and the very next verse Moshe "is grown and begins to go out to his own people," spotting the Egyptian smiting the Jew.

What emerges from the text is that Moshe had been unaware that the Jews were being cruelly enslaved, and that on a daily basis many were being beaten to death. As noted, Paro had taken pains to distance Moshe from the harsh reality that reigned in Egypt due to the decree of Paro, himself.

Moshe's world was about to collapse. Not because he had killed an Egyptian but because of the sudden awareness that the man who had been like a father to him, who had educated and provided him with all of the world's bounty, Paro, was in fact a cruel despot who was subjugating an entire nation; and what is more, it was the nation of Yosef, who had saved Egypt.

Moses understood that he must approach Paro and chastise him. Yet that was a mission impossible for two reasons: Moshe understood now that the Egyptian economy was based on slavery, and all of Egypt's military and political power derived from its strong economic situation.

Moreover, Moshe was incapable of castigating Paro because he loved Paro and Batya and identified himself as an Egyptian. Moshe was left with no choice but to flee Egypt to escape the reality in which he was indirectly a partner due to his associations with the monarchy.

Moshe fled to Midian and without any intent found himself in the house of Yitro. Who was Yitro? The Talmud in Sotah relates that Paro had three advisors who were privy to the plan to enslave the Jewish People: Yitro, Bilam and Iyov. When Paro

presented his plan, Bilam agreed immediately, Iyov remained silent, and Yitro fled to Midian.

Here “hashgacha pratit” (Divine Providence) directed Moshe, the escapee, to the home of Yitro, the escapee.

Yitro knew Moshe from Paro’s palace, and Moshe knew Yitro, as well. In the cold nights of Midian, as Moshe and Yitro sat around the warm hearth, Yitro thought to himself that the only person who could influence Paro was his beloved Moshe, the man sitting across from him, yet Moshe had fled from his moral responsibility. Moshe thought to himself that the policy of slavery was largely facilitated by Yitro’s not having opposed it, instead preferring flight. Moshe and Yitro were two men who had fled from their moral responsibilities, expected of anyone with a spark of integrity and fairness.

One day, Moshe was herding Yitro’s flocks on Mount Chorev, i.e., Mount Sinai. Suddenly he noticed a wondrous sight – a burning bush that was not being consumed. When Moshe drew near to the strange sight, he heard a voice telling him to return to Egypt, to approach Paro, to identify himself as a member of the Jewish People and to demand that Paro release the Jewish people. For seven days and nights he stood firm in his refusal, arguing by various means that he was not the right man for the mission.

And how indeed was it possible to refuse HaShem for even a moment, let alone seven days and nights?

As a rule, HaShem does not force spirituality on a person. Everyone is given free will to choose between good and evil. What happened there on the mountain did not involve HaShem’s immediately commanding Moshe to undertake the mission, but rather His arousing Moshe’s pure conscience. For an entire week, Moshe’s conscience weighed upon him to do the right thing, to approach Paro and demand freedom for the Jewish People.

Moshe struggled to block out the truth within his conscience, but ultimately gave in and decided that he must return to Egypt. Once he made that decision, HaShem revealed Himself and appointed Moshe as His emissary until the day of his death on Mount Avarim.

Moshe returned to Egypt, to the palace of his childhood, to his “mother” Batya and to his “grandfather” Paro whom he so much loved.

One can only imagine what occurred when Moshe entered the royal palace after being away for decades. Paro hurriedly summoned Batya. Moshe approached them, and Batya ran to hug and kiss him, tearfully exclaiming, “Moshe, my son! Moshe, my son! Where have you been?” Yet Moshe did not respond. Then Paro alighted from his high throne and with a penetrating gaze said, in a tone of anger and pain: “Where were you? Not a letter! Not a single message! Look at your mother Batya who raised you from when you were an infant. Her eyes are red from crying over you!”

Paro waited for an answer that did not come. So, he said to Moshe, “What do you have to say, Moshe?” Moshe looked at Paro and at Batya, and with tears in his eyes, declared, “Let my people go!”

Paro was shocked by what he heard. “Let my people go?” What are you talking about? We are your people!”

Moshe gazed directly at Paro, raised his voice, and proclaimed, “The Hebrew slaves are my people! If you do not free them, the God of the Hebrews will kill your first-born son!” But Paro had no sons. In fact, Moshe was announcing that if Paro did not free the Israelites, he would no longer be able to view Moshe as part of the royal family. Paro could not bear the threat that Moshe would be cut off from him, but to the same extent he could not sabotage the economic infrastructure of his kingdom – his Hebrew slaves.

In order to free the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, Moshe would have to trample Paro's glory and humiliate him in the extreme. But how could Moshe trample the man who had given him his life as a gift, and had raised and educated him as a son?

Moshe had come a long way to being the liberator of Am Yisrael, but there was one more hurdle that Moshe would have to overcome – the way Moshe related to Paro.

Moshe's attitude would have to sink from the heights of love to the depths of hatred. Paro's reaction to Moshe's request to allow the Israelites a number of days of rest, "in order to serve HaShem" (Shemot 5:1), was to increase the suffering:

"You are indolent!" retorted Paro. "Lazy! That's why you are saying that you want to sacrifice to HaShem. Now go! Get to work! You will not be given any straw, but you must deliver your quota of bricks." (Shemot 5:17-18)

At that moment, Moshe understood just how evil Paro had become. Moshe said: "All your officials here will come and bow down to me. They will say, 'Leave! You and all your followers!' Only then will I leave.' He left Paro in great anger" (11:8).

At this point, Moshe turned full circle and was now in the position to smite the Egyptians with ten plagues, after replacing his deep feelings of love for Paro with a deeper feeling of disgust and hatred for the man.

At that moment the Egyptian called Moses became Moshe the messenger of HaShem and soon to become "Moshe Rabbeinu".

The connection between the Moshe episode and the killing spree on

Last Shemini Atzeret

Until October 7th there were many in the country who believed that peace between Jews and Arabs can come about if we would be a little more forth coming in our policies to them. Their position was based on the belief that people are basically good, and the two states can live in peace and harmony, like America and Canada.

The US State Department has traditionally been anti-Jewish even in the horrific years of World War Two when the gates to the "Golden Land" were double locked, and its opposition to the establishment of the Jewish State, and their present policy of two states between the river and the sea. Every thinking person understands that such an arrangement would spell the end of the Jewish state and all its inhabitants. Even now after the Arabs of Gaza and Judea-Shomron have shown their poison fangs the Secretary of State (A Jew, what else!) is demanding that we agree to the establishment of this terror state.

HaShem brought about the horrific events of Oct. 7th to exhibit the profound hate that the Arabs possess for the Jews, no less than that of the Germans. Interesting fact: there is no documentation of a Nazi committing suicide in order to kill a Jew, but the Arabs are proud of their suicide bombers. So, there is no amount of compromise that could overcome their enmity.

Our "leftists" had a shocking awakening when it became disclosed in a survey that nearly all of our Arabs support Hamas and the atrocities they committed.

Moshe had to experience the evil in the heart of Paro as a pre-condition to becoming the leader who would free the Jews, and our Israeli leftists had to experience the ingrained evil in the hearts of our neighbors.

We know now that there is no room for our Arab enemies in this country. The question we will have to deal with in the near future is if our political and military leaders have the courage to remove these devils from our midst, as did our father Avraham did when he expelled Yishmael and Hagar from his home.

Conclusion: Even the events of Shemini Atzeret 5784 can be led by the precedents set down in the Torah over 3000 years ago.

Shabbat Shalom and Chodesh Tov,

Nachman Kahana

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