

Shemot 5774

BS"D Parasha Shemot

Part A: Mysteries Hidden in the Parasha

At the heart of our Parasha is one of the most emotionally charged human dramas in history, before which the greatest plays of Shakespeare pale.

The story of the child with the Hebrew name Tuvia (or Avigdor), who later became the Egyptian called Moshe.

The following are only a few of the mysteries hidden in the Parasha.

The Torah relates that Moshe went out one day "to his brothers and he saw their suffering, and he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew of his brothers." Moshe is so reviled by the scene that he kills the Egyptian.

1) Why was Moshe so shocked at the beating of a Jewish slave? Did he not know that millions of Jews were being beaten daily?

2) If indeed the conduct of the Egyptian taskmaster justified his being punished, why did Moshe not bring the matter before his adopted father, the Pharaoh? Why did he prefer to run away?

3) Of all people in the land of Midian, how is it that Moshe finds himself "by chance" in the house of Yitro?

4) At the scene of the mysterious burning bush, for a period of seven days, Moshe rejects HaShem's command that he return to Egypt. How does one argue with the Creator for even an instant, much less a whole week?

5) How does Moshe enter the palace – and attain an audience with Pharaoh – seemingly at will? And when he orders Pharaoh

to free millions of slaves, why does Pharaoh tolerate Moshe at all? Why does he not give the order to rid himself of this man?

6) At the first meeting with Pharaoh which transpired before the first plague, a full year before the death of the firstborn Egyptians, Moshe already warns Pharaoh that his own "bechor" (firstborn) will "die." But Pharaoh had no bechor, his only child was his daughter Batya (Bitya)?

I suggest the following but with reserve and apology if I am wrong.

We meet Moshe for the first time as an infant, the next time he appears in the Torah as an adult with the Egyptian name Moshe.

As a member of the royal family, being the adopted son of Batya, he was certainly well versed in Egyptian culture. He undoubtedly completed the officer's training course at "West Point" and he was the honored guest at the cocktail parties given by the movers and shakers of Egyptian society.

Don't believe that Amram and Yocheved had visitation rights with the young Moshe, and at these opportunities his true father taught him Yiddishkeit. Moshe was culturally an Egyptian. He was the beloved "son" of Pharaoh, and as the Midrash tells us, Pharaoh would often hold him on his lap. Pharaoh, his daughter, and many of the older courtiers (and probably Moshe himself), were aware of Moshe's background – he was a Hebrew who was adopted by the childless Batya.

With this in mind Pharaoh, who very much loved the clever and handsome Moshe, was anxious to eradicate every semblance of Moshe's past from the boy's consciousness, and certainly anxious to hide from him the intolerable servitude of the Hebrew people. The way to do this was to distance Moshe from life's realities. And as Rashi comments, Pharaoh appointed Moshe "al beito" – "over his palace," whereby Moshe would

remain far from matters of the realm, having to concentrate on the complex affairs of the royal court.

One day, the Torah relates, Moshe ventures out to see the hinterland. He perceives a scene which was totally unexpected – the mass oppression of the Jewish people as the basis of the Egyptian economy. He is overwhelmed when he sees a taskmaster beating a Jewish slave. Moshe's sense of outrage arouses him to punish the oppressor.

Moshe is distraught – not because he killed the man, but rather, he was traumatized at the knowledge that Pharaoh, the man he loved as a father, is capable of this inhuman treatment to a people who did only good for the Egyptian nation. It is like waking up one day to find out that one's father was the commandant of the Auschwitz extermination camp.

Moshe could confront Pharaoh with the fact that he is now aware of the secret which was being held back from him. But to do so would be to accuse the man, who Moshe loved so much, of heinous crimes; Pharaoh, who saved Moshe from death and provided him with the life of a prince. Moshe saw only one way out – to run away. Because to fulfill his moral obligation of standing up to Pharaoh and the entire Egyptian leadership was too awesome a task.

Moshe arrives at the home of Yitro. Who was Yitro? The Talmud (Tractate Sota) tells us that Pharaoh had three advisors: Yitro, Bil'am and Ei'yov. When Pharaoh brought up the matter of enslaving the Jews, Bil'am agreed, Ei'yov gave no opinion and Yitro RAN AWAY.

HaShem plans it that Moshe, the RUNAWAY from his responsibilities, finds himself in the home of the original runaway, Yitro. During the cold winter nights of Midian, while sitting around the fire, Moshe looks at Yitro and thinks to himself: if Yitro had not escaped his moral responsibilities, and had he rejected outright the proposal to enslave the Jews,

there would have been no slavery. And Yitro, who knew Moshe as a child, looks at Moshe and thinks that Moshe is the only person in the kingdom who can influence Pharaoh, but Moshe ran away!

One day, Moshe is tending the sheep at Mount Chorev, and sees a wondrous sight – a burning bush which is not consumed. He draws closer and hears a voice. But it is not the voice of HaShem. It is the influence of this holy place which arouses Moshe's conscience. For seven days Moshe's conscience paralyzes him at that spot. To return and confront Pharaoh with the fact that he is a despot, or to let time run its course? At the end of seven days Moshe resolves his conflict and decides to return and help his Jewish family. At this point HaShem appears to Moshe, but only after Moshe's internal decision was to do the right thing.

Moshe returns to Egypt and to the palace; to the place of his childhood and to his beloved "mother" Batya, and to Pharaoh whom he dearly loves.

I picture the scene as follows: Moshe arrives at the palace gates, after being away (according to one opinion) for forty years. He requests of the guard to allow him entrance to the palace, to speak with Pharaoh. The sentry asks him if he has an appointment? Moshe says he does not, but requests the sentry to inform Pharaoh that "Moshe" is here. The sentry goes inside to Pharaoh's personal secretary telling him that a certain "Moshe" wants to see Pharaoh. The secretary probably answered that without a previous appointment no one can see Pharaoh. The sentry tells the secretary that the strange-looking man said to tell Pharaoh that "Moshe" wishes an audience. The private secretary goes into the throne room and tells Pharaoh that a certain "Moshe" wishes an audience. Pharaoh jumps up and calls out to Batya to come immediately. "Moshe is back!" Moshe comes in. Pharaoh looks at Moshe and asks, "Where have you been all this time? Look. Your mother Batya who saved your life, look at her eyes which have not

stopped crying out of longing for you.” Then Pharaoh says to Moshe, “What do you have to say for yourself?”

Moshe looks at Pharaoh and at his beloved Batya, and with tears in his eyes calls out to Pharaoh “sh’lach et ami” – “let my people go!” Pharaoh descends from his throne and says, “Moshe, WE are your people!” Moshe answers, “The Israelite slaves are my people.” And Moshe continues, “And if you do not send out the Jews, then HaShem will kill your first born son.” But since Pharaoh has no son, Moshe was telling Pharaoh that if does not free the Jews then he, Moshe, will no longer feel as a son to Pharaoh. Pharaoh cannot bear this threat from his beloved Moshe, but he also cannot free the slaves.

I cannot prove that this is in fact what transpired, but it must have been very similar. For it must have been Pharaoh’s love towards Moshe which prevented the former from killing the man who would overturn the entire national order. And it had to be a person like Moshe, who was intimately associated with Pharaoh, who could come before the royal court and not be overwhelmed by the grandeur of the ambiance.

The emotional scenes between Moshe and Pharaoh end in a very surprising way. Chazal say that all the Egyptian army was destroyed at the crossing of Yam Suf except for one person who was saved – Pharaoh himself. Pharaoh is saved by HaShem in deference to Moshe’s love for the man who so much loved Moshe.

Now, Moshe’s mission was to bring Pharaoh down to his knees, and agree to free the Jewish nation. But how can Moshe, who is eternally grateful to Pharaoh and Batya for everything they did for him, bring suffering to those he loved and respected so much?

HaShem has to cause a change of heart in Moshe regarding Pharaoh and all of the ministers and courtiers he knows so well. Moshe has to come from the heights of love to the heights of enmity and hostility. HaShem succeeds in bringing

this about by sending Moshe to Pharaoh to plead for his people. But when Pharaoh refuses and indeed commands that the yoke of servitude be made heavier, Moshe sees the man for what he really is. Moshe is now in the mindset to bring punishment upon Pharaoh.

Part B: Facts are often Stranger than Fiction

If a Jewish periodical would have published the following prediction, during the 80th year of the cruel and relentless period of Jewish slavery in Egypt, what would a rational person conclude?

“An individual who was a major member of Pharo’s royal court will soon reveal himself to be a Jew and will lead the Jewish slaves to freedom.”

The rational reader would conclude that the writer was merely trying to draw the readers’ attention.

And if the article continued, “This individual will bring about ten plagues which in one year will cause havoc with the Egyptian economy, cause great physical pain to all the Egyptians and bring the Angel of Death to every Egyptian family”.

The rational reader would conclude that the writer was delusional.

And if the article continued: “Pharo will be forced to permit all the Jewish slaves to leave the country taking with them all of the Egyptian wealth. However, 80% of the Jews – numbering millions of people – will refuse to follow their great leader and, instead, will choose to remain in Egypt and die during the plague of darkness.”

At this point, the rational reader would conclude that the writer was guilty of drug abuse.

And if the article continued: “The newly freed Jewish people

will experience a spiritual revelation resulting in their being designated as the Creator's chosen nation. And after one year of sojourn in the desert, they will be commanded by God to enter the Holy Land. However, out of fear of the resident Canaanites, they will refuse and the entire male generation of 600,000 men will die".

At this point, the rational reader would conclude that the writer who suggested that 80% of the nation will refuse to leave Egypt and die and another 600,000 men will refuse HaShem's directive to enter the Land and will die, is not delusional nor is he under the influence of drugs but simply a lowlife anti-Semite searching out the iniquities of the Jewish people.

Now, if in the year 1900, a periodical would have published the following predictions, what would a rational Jew think?

"After the prayers of 2000 years that HaShem restore His people to Eretz Yisrael, a grassroots movement has begun functioning to arouse the Jewish people to return home, but will encounter opposition from many illustrious religious leaders."

The rational reader would conclude that the writer was merely trying to draw attention, because rabbis would be the first to lead the people in returning to the holy land.

And if the article would continue: "In forty years, the enlightened Germans together with many willing Christian and Moslem helpers will construct extermination camps where over 7 million Jews (the present estimate of historians) will be shot, gassed and burned to death".

The rational reader would conclude that the writer was delusional, because: 1- the enlightened peoples of Europe could never do such things, and 2- by that time the Jews of Europe would already have followed their rabbis to Eretz Yisrael.

And if the article continued: "After the murders, two thirds of the world's nations will join in an organization called the United Nations and vote for the establishment of an independent Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael. However, a great number of religious Jews the world over will choose not to return to the Holy Land, but will continue to pray to HaShem that He bring them home.

At this point, the rational reader would conclude that the writer is suffering from drug abuse, because if the world's nations would ever vote for a Jewish State it would be the obvious "hand" of HaShem.

And if the article continued: "There will be very vocal religious groups in the galut which will side with the worst of the Jewish State's enemies, such as Iran who has stated publicly that they will erase the Jewish State. And there will be large numbers of religious people in the State of Israel who will prefer to go to jail or worse, just not to serve in Tzahal."

At this point, the reader would conclude that the writer who suggested that Jews who are faithful to the Torah will refuse to leave the galut, and some will extend help to our enemies, and others would disregard the great mitzva of defending the Jewish people in the Holy Land, is not delusional nor under the influence of drugs but simply an anti-Semite. Because the first to join in the defense of Eretz Yisrael would be the dati'im in the spirit of King David.

Facts are often stranger than fiction, and nothing is more difficult than correlating the conduct of certain groups and cults with the ideals of classic Judaism.

Love of fellow Jew. Love of Eretz Yisrael and willingness to defend our sovereignty against all enemies (the essence of the Books of Yehoshua, Shoftim, Shmuel and Melachim). And the presentation of Torah and mitzvot in a way which touches the

“pintele Yid” and draws him and her into the golden circle of G-d’s chosen people.

Too many of our fellow Jews are suffering from amnesia, forgetting who we are, who our ancestors were, from where we have come and where we are supposed to be. May HaShem have pity on us – His children – and send us leaders who are blessed with the spirit of ahavat Torah and ahavat Yisrael.

Shabbat Shalom,

Nachman Kahana

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