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PARSHAS SHEMOS EDITION – VOLUME 15, ISSUE 1 – TEVES 18th, 5785/JANUARY 18th, 2025

PARSHAS SHEMOS INSIGHTS – THE GREATEST MOTIVATOR POSSIBLE, WRITTEN BY MENDEL BERLIN, EDITOR

A Swiss man, looking for directions pulled up to a bus stop where two Americans were waiting. "Sie Deutsch sprechen?" he asked. The just stared at him.

"Excusez-moi, parlez vous Francais?" he tried. The two continued to stare. "Parlare Italiano?"

No response. "Hablan ustedes Espanol?" Still nothing. The Swiss guy drove off, extremely disgusted. The first American turned to the second and remarked, "You know, maybe we should learn a foreign language." "Why?" says the other.

"That guy knew four languages, and it didn't do him any good."

It used to be that when someone set out on a road trip, they had to get directions beforehand. They could not estimate when they would arrive at their destination. While no trip is a guaranteed success, with modern technology like Waze, one can determine not only the exact E.T.A., but all the conditions they will encounter on the road. However, while a GPS can tell you how to get somewhere, it cannot tell you where to go. Direction and a sense of purpose in life is not something too many people concern themselves with until it becomes an urgent need. It's not that people can't plan. There are people who spend months planning a holiday vacation; however, they have never spent a day planning their lives. People often end up in challenging relationships, career, and communities, because they didn't plan. Those of us who do plan our lives and know our mission can also sometimes get caught in a vicious cycle, stuck in the rat-race living the world finds itself in, and lose our motivation to march forward. What is the most inspirational way to get ourselves back on track?

In this week's Parsha, Shemos, upon hearing that the redeemer will be born to the Jews, Pharaoh demanded that all newborn males must be cast into the Nile River. When Moshe was born, his mother - who feared for his life - put him into a waterproof basket and set him afloat in the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter, Basya, came to bathe in the Nile, and took the child as her own. She also named him (Shemos 1:10): **"She called his name Moshe, as she said, 'I drew him from the water.'"** Moshe is the name that the Torah uses for the greatest prophet/leader/person who has ever lived, but that name wasn't his Jewish name. At his bris, Moshe's mother called him Avigdor (or Tuvia). Why was he known to people as Moshe?



To gain the proper perspective, let's fast-forward a few decades later, while Moshe was shepherding his father-in-law's flocks in the wilderness. Moshe arrived at the "mountain of G-d." There, he saw a bush burning, yet it was not being consumed by the fire. Moshe was walking by, noticed it, stopped, turned, and asked (Shemos 3:3), "why will the bush not be consumed?" When Hashem saw that Moshe cares to investigate, He was pleased and called out to him (Shemos 3:4): "Moshe, Moshe."

Rabbi Daniel Glatstein quotes a fascinating answer suggested by **Rabbi Berel Wein**. Rabbi Wein explained that he was once visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum and walked into a new exhibit based on a horrific Holocaust statistic. This was the exhibit sponsored by Abe and Edith Spiegel, who were originally from Ukraine, and were imprisoned at Auschwitz where they lost their 2½ -year-old son, Uziel. The Spiegels survived the war, moved to America, and wanted to honor their lost son - together with the 1.5 million children killed in the Holocaust. This exhibit was called the Children's Memorial. Rabbi Wein recalls walking into the pitch-black room of the exhibit and being dumbfounded by the sight he beheld.

(SEE NEXT PAGE FOR THE CONTINUATION)

In this tall room, there was one candle lit in the middle of the room, but by the genius of the architect, through reflections and mirrors, the one candle becomes a million pinpoints of light in that darkness. “Once your eyes adjust to the sight,” Rabbi Wein relates, “one hears over the loudspeaker a voice reciting names. Hillel Cohen, 3 years old, Vilna. Miriam Goldberg, 7 years old, Sarajevo. Names, names, names, until you can’t bear it anymore and you run out of the room! Outside the room, one thought kept going through my head: I didn’t hear my name called. I am of age and I could’ve ended up in such a predicament. The fact that I didn’t hear it means that I must do something with my life! I have to push myself to learn more, to help people, to make my existence justify the miracles that were performed.”

Now we can understand why Hashem called Moshe by that name. Every time Hashem mentioned the name “Moshe,” the Holy One was telling him, “You know, you should’ve been eaten by the crocodiles or drowned in the Nile. You could’ve shared the fate of the many boys who drowned, but I yanked you out and saved you!” Moshe then had no choice but to say, “Hineni – Okay, Hashem, you got me. Let’s accomplish something great.”

That is when and how the mission to become the redeemer was introduced to Moshe. When we lose a sense of direction or will-power in life – which can happen to the best of us, as mentioned above, we should challenge ourselves with the following thought-pattern to help stir us to action: “Hashem gave me the wherewithal and resources to do something great with my life by giving me life itself. This means that I can do and add something in this world that no one else can!” Once that awareness dawns upon a person, one can expect to find messages in the form of opportunities from Hashem every day.

It may be something as grandiose as supporting the needy and the sick or going to Pharaoh to tell him to free the Jews. It could also be something as basic as not getting upset when we’re stuck in a traffic jam that even the G.P.S. didn’t predict. It’s in those moments where we may be stationary that we start to realize that we’re really going places by perfecting ourselves and making the world better! Let’s learn from Moshe to turn, observe, and take advantage!

SHORT STORY OF THE WEEK BY YONI SCHWARTZ

When the **Ponevezher Rav**, ZT”L, was laying the foundation stone for the famous Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak he said that the yeshiva really started fifty-four years before, when he was a young boy. One night there was an unprecedented snowstorm. His parents told him and his older brothers that since there’s no way to go to yeshiva without boots and there’s only one pair, only one child could go. Seeing that each boy desperately wanted to go to yeshiva, the parents figured that the only fair way to choose is through a lottery.

The next morning, at about 4:30 A.M., his mother woke up the oldest son. Excited, he asked, “Did I win?” She responded, “No, but I’ll take you to school anyway.” She put on their only pair of boots, wrapped her son up warm, put him on her shoulders, and carried him on her shoulders to Yeshiva.

The normally five-minute walk took her half an hour due to the snow and the child’s weight on her shoulders. She immediately raced back home and did this to the next oldest. By the time she reached the boy who would become the Ponevezh Rav, she was exhausted, fingers blue and nose red, but the fire in her soul fueled her to keep going. When carrying him on her shoulders, she whispered, “Hashem, you know I’m only doing this so my children can experience the sweetness of Torah. Please help them to always learn Torah and love it.”



Almost tearing up, he leaned over and whispered in his mother’s frozen ear and spoke up: “Ma, I heard what you said. Since you’re doing what you’re doing to make sure that boys learn, one day, because of you, I’ll build a yeshiva where boys can learn.”

Comment: We witness the greatness of many women in Parshas Shemos: Shifrah, Puah, and Miriam. The Jewish nation was saved because of the courage of these and all the brave women in history who carried the weight of Klal Yisrael on their shoulders. Whether it is a mother, a wife, or a sister, behind every great man is an even greater woman.

Dedicated to the memory of Yitzhak Arama, Robert Petrosyan, Ida Teplitsky, David Torban, and Mordko Koifman who were always the guiding light and foundation of our family. Without a doubt they are present in our lives every day and are sharing in the success of their children and grandchildren.

SHEMOS – WHAT’S YOUR NAME?

Some Jews come to know the Five Books of the Torah by their English terms: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. We also find different names to each of the books in commentaries like **Rashi**. Bereishis is called *Sefer Yetzirah* (Creation), Vayikra is *Sefer Kohanim* (speaks of the Kohanim), Bamidbar is *Sefer Pekudim* (countings/numbers), and Devarim is *Mishneh Torah* (repetition of the Torah). Shemos is called *Sefer Geulah* – Exodus.

Rav

Noach Weinberg, ZT”L, said the Jews have been accused of terrible things, but have never been called stupid, so what’s the reason why we call Shemos by that name? It’s not just because it’s the first significant word in the Parsha. Why is the Sefer of Geulah called Shemos?

Let’s offer an answer based on the Midrash, which teaches that after 210 years of exile in Egypt, slavery, and torture, the Hebrews kept their Jewish names and did not assimilate. They went down to Egypt with those names, and they returned with the same Jewish names, but in exile, they had no names. When I was younger, I thought I would play the guitar, but I did not have the proper level of dexterity. The only thing I could play was the introduction to “Secret Agent Man” by Johnny Rivers. There’s a line in that 60’s song that goes, “*They’ve given you a number, and taken away your name.*” This is because in prison, one loses their identity; a name defines who they are. When Adam was created, Hashem told him to name all the animals, as the names he gave them captured their essence.



When we came down to *Mitzrayim* (Egypt), we were called names like Reuven, Shimon, Levi, and Yehudah – we knew who we were. Yet, if one looks at the start of the Parsha, suddenly all the names disappeared. Moshe’s name is not immediately revealed, and neither were his parents (the Torah just says that a man from Levi took the daughter of Levi, without mentioning Amram and Yocheved by name). In fact, it was Bas Pharaoh who named Moshe, and her name is not disclosed either.

So, we see a process where the names are not initially there. Yet, in next week’s Parsha, Va’era – where we speak of the Geulah (Redemption), all the generations are mentioned. This is because in order to be redeemed, there must be names. That’s why there was a census, as we identify people. A lot of people don’t know their names or who they are. It is customary to recite a Pasuk symbolizing one’s name before the end of Shemone Esrei. The Pasuk should begin and end with the first and last letters of the name so that one remembers this Pasuk and thusly their name when they arrive in Shomayim.

We know our name down here, but do we know that our name is a Pasuk in the Torah? We must find our names – who we really are – and what we are doing in this world. When we find our name and mission, only then can we have a true Geulah in this World, *Im Yirtzeh Hashem*.

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SHEMOS - SLAVERY AND YOU (PART ONE OF SIX IN THE SHOVAVIM SERIES)

This week begins a series of Parshiyos known by the abbreviation of “Shovavim”. The early Mekubalim established these weeks for a time of Teshuvah and various Tikkunim, including fasting and giving Tzeddaka. Nowadays, many use this period to focus on raising awareness and meticulousness in areas of personal Kedusha (Shmiras Einayim) and Shalom Bayis (*Taharas HaMishpacha*), where appropriate. Some also have the Minhag to engage in Ta’anis Dibbur to rectify inappropriate and hurtful speech.

At first glance, this seems appropriate as the word Shovavim reminds us of the Navi’s declaration to us of “*Shuvu Banim Shovavim - return wayward children!*” Hashem is inviting us, His children, to come back to him and rectify our behavior. On a deeper level, though, Shovavim is not just a convenient *Roshei Teivos* for these Parshiyos. It is the very story of Klal Yisrael as told through these Parshiyos. *It’s a reversal of the Pasuk: Shemos and Va’era describe the state of “Shovavim” that the Jewish people had diverted off course.*

Shemos: We see a people who have descended into a morally bankrupt culture, enslaved in body and in mentality.

Vaera: Even after Moshe arrives and promises them a vision of hope, they still do not have the capacity to fully engage with that vision “*M’Kotzer Ruach V’Avodah Kasha*” (due to shortness of breath).

Bo and Beshalach are where the Jews started to be identified and identify themselves as “Banim”:

Bo: Moshe starts to teach them how to change their story and see themselves as Bnei Chorin with Pesach, Matzah, and Marror.

B’shalach: Yam Suf and Mann: seeing Hashem’s Hand in everything so clearly.

Yisro and Mishpatim: Shuvu - Finally the Jews have arrived.

SPLENDID QUOTE OF THE WEEK
BY RABBI MENACHEM LOMNER

“Even when helping someone out, you must respect their feelings.”

Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu that he must go and be the messenger to redeem the Jews from *Mitzrayim*. During that conversation, Moshe made a negative comment about the Jews. Due to this, he was given a sign that was a hint that he spoke *Lashon Hara* about them.

Moshe was in the middle arguably the most important conversation in all of history to save the entire nation from extinction, but the fact that he said a bad word about the Jews earned him a reprimand. We must always care for other’s feelings. Even at times that we can say, “I am helping that person, so it’s okay”, this is not a valid reason.

Yisro: receiving the fundamentals of the Torah and achieving the status of “*Mamleches Kohanim V’Goy Kadosh*”

Mishpatim: The details are just as important. Now they are ready to say *Na’aseh V’Nishma* (“We will do and we will understand”). Over the next few weeks, we will explore how this shows up in detail and draw some practical steps and takeaways that can help us with whichever area we are looking to rectify for ourselves.

Let’s start with Shemos. The area of Mitzrayim near the Nile River was a fertile paradise. What this means is that, in addition to what we know of Mitzrayim being a society that had loose morals around *Inyanei Arayos*, it was also one of great economic success and materialism. Despite the slavery, there was still opportunity and a social hierarchy which included perks. For the generation that left, this was the only existence that they knew.

Later, when the Torah tells us that even when Pharaoh died, the Jewish people still cried out in agony. They were so convinced that he was the only villain that was causing their distress and that once he was gone, everything would get better. The rude awakening was that it only got worse. When we are struggling with an area of life that we feel little or no control, this is what happens.

We succumb to our environment and its norms. We shift the responsibility to others, hoping that something will change. We suppress inner pain because it’s too uncomfortable to deal with. We become enslaved and lack awareness of our empowerment.

Takeaway question: Where do I find myself hopelessly imprisoned, resigned to the fact that I cannot empower myself to change?

MAY THE LEARNING IN THIS MAGAZINE BE A ZECHUS FOR THE SAFETY AND PROTECTION OF OUR FAMILY IN ERETZ YISRAEL. IT SHOULD ALSO BE A ZECHUS FOR A FULL REFUAH OF LEEBA MIRIAM GEULAH BAS LEAH.

SUGAR RUSH ON THE 613 MITZVOS BY R’ELI REIT
MITZVAH # 146 – SHECHITAH

We must *shecht* (slaughter with a knife) animals and birds before eating them. As the Pasuk (Devarim 12:21) says: “*You shall slaughter your cattle and sheep as you were commanded*”. Nowadays, many “enlightened” people consider slaughtering inhumane and instead insist on stunning the animal or some other form of “humane” killing.

Some even insist that it is malicious to kill animals altogether. The response to such an attack is that Hashem created the world and He is the One who decides what is morality.

Last week's question: Why were the Jews exiled to Egypt if there is no mention of a specific sin that caused it? What was the purpose of this exile?

Answer: In his commentary on the Torah, the **Ran** (Bereishis 15:13) explains that many people are bothered by why the Jewish people went to exile in Mitzrayim (the **Abarbanel**, the **Maharal**, and the **Alsich Hakodesh** discuss this, as well). Before we offer an explanation, let us cite the Gemara (Nedarim 32a) which asks: Why was Avraham punished that his children should be enslaved for 210 years in Mitzrayim?

The first answer from Rabbi Avahu: Because he used scholars to wage war, as it says, "He gathered his disciples who had been raised in his home." The second reason - Shmuel said: Because he questioned Hashem, as it says [he asked Hashem], "How will I know that I will inherit [the land of Cana'an]?" Finally, Rabbi Yochanan said: Because he prevented people from converting as it says [that the king of Shalem said to Avraham], "Give me the souls and take the possessions." Avraham could have asked the Sages not to go to war, not to question Hashem, and to facilitate conversion. we must still ask: this was enough for the Jewish nation to be enslaved and suffering in Egypt for 210 years?

The **Maharal** (*Gevuras Hashem*, Chapter 71) explains that Avraham was the *shoreish* – the root of everything. There was clearly a sin that led to the exile, and when there is a lack (no matter how small) in the root, it is manifested in the branches and everything that follows. As such, it makes sense that the offspring of Avraham, should be exiled. Still, it's hard to understand.

The **Pri Tzaddik** (Lech Lecha, Oys 4) writes that there was no sin that the Jewish people had to suffer from. Rather, the exile in Egyptian was for their own good because in order to get the Torah, one needs to undergo some *issurim* (difficulties). Therefore, the Pri Tzaddik writes that the Gemara is not saying that Avraham's sins caused the exile. Instead, the Gemara is explaining why Avraham had to hear about the exile in the first place.

A similar explanation is given by the **Shelah Hakodesh** (in Parshas Lech Lecha). We had to be slaves in Egypt because Hashem wanted to instill in us the concept of *avdim* (servitude). The Jews had to learn what it meant to be *avdim*, after which we could serve Hashem and the Torah properly. This is what the Pasuk (Shemos 20:2) means when it says (in the first of the ten commandments): "*I am Hashem Your G-d, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of avadim* (bondage)."

For us to be able to be *avdim*. The Shelah adds that this is why we call Eretz Canaan by that name even after it was called Eretz Yisrael. Canaan was an *eved*, and we got the land through the trait of *hachna'ah* (humility). As such, no sin was done to get this; it was just a preparation for the traits that we needed to embody. However, we know that the Jewish nation was on the 49th level of *tuma'ah* (impurity), as the **Zohar Hakodesh** brings down (Parshas Yisro).

Was it worth it to be placed in such spiritual danger just so we could undergo the process of "suffering before acquiring the Holy Land"? This risk was very high for us to get assimilated. Besides, the Tribe of Levi didn't even experience servitude. They didn't learn to become *avdim*, then?



Let's attempt one final solution, as explained by the **Alsich Hakodesh** (among others). He posits that the Egyptian slavery marks an exception, as it served a particular purpose. The Pasuk (Devarim 4:20) refers to the experience of the Egyptian exile as "*Kur Ha'barzel*" – "the iron furnace" (which purifies gold). This period of bondage and persecution is likened to a "*Kur*," a furnace used for refining metals. The Jews were brought to Egypt to be cleansed and purged of their impurities, just as a metal is placed in a furnace so it can be cleaned of all impurities.

The impurities that needed to be purged originated from Adam and Chava's sin in Gan Eden. The Sages teach that at the time when the snake lured Chava to partake of the forbidden fruit, it injected an element of "*Zuhama*" – "filth" – within her, and this impurity was passed on to her descendants – to all of humanity. Hence, before the Jews could stand at Har Sinai, behold G-d's revelation, and receive the Torah, they needed to be cleansed of this impurity.

As such, they were brought into the "furnace" – the period of Egyptian bondage, as through this suffering, they were completely cleansed of their "*zuhama*". The **Ohr Hachaim** adds (Shemos 3:8) that to purify every single part of Klal Yisrael, they had to go to the lowest place. It's hard to understand what "purification" means, it is a Pasuk in the Torah and therefore we must live it.

What's the lesson here? Whether you say like the Pri Tzaddik (that it was for the *issurim*), or the Shelah (to learn servitude), or the Alsich (it was a purification process), there is one common denominator. Everything that happens to us from Above is for our own good. Sometimes, we are beset by challenges and may feel like we are not getting anywhere in *Avodas Hashem* (serving Hashem).

One way to look at this experience is that we are undergoing our own personal *Galus* (exile). Just like *Galus Mitzrayim* was there to ultimately connect the Jewish people to Hashem in Eretz Yisrael, a person can be eventually *zoche* (merit) their own *Geulah* (Redemption) and see the light at the end of their tunnel, B'Ezras Hashem.

This week's question: Why did Hashem instruct Moshe to throw down his staff as a sign, even though the Egyptian magicians could replicate it?

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*Summary: After discussing the idea of Chassidus in intent, the Ramchal proceeds to start dissecting Chassidus in action. He told us that there are two ways to act towards Hashem: out of Yirah (Fear) or out of Ahavah (love). Now, the Ramchal will unpack the first one he brought up, Yirah. He writes: **The primary aspect of fear of Hashem is fear of His exaltedness. When one is engaged in prayer or performing a Mitzvah, he must realize it is before the King of kings that he is praying or doing a Mitzvah. This is what the Tanna exhorts us saying: 'when you pray, know before Whom you are praying' (Brachos 28b).*** (Mesilas Yesharim, Ch. 19)

There are two types of yirah: yiras haonesh (fear of punishment) and yiras haromemus (awe of Hashem's greatness). Fear of retribution is a lower level (if only a fraction of people mastered it!) and not what the Ramchal is referring to at this later stage in human development. How many of us really think about Hashem's greatness when we "believe" that He is listening to us, during our prayers? If one could visualize a great dignitary visiting, one would not be busy checking their WhatsApp or schmoozing with their friend in his presence. However, the frequency of prayer and the lack of effort in truly thinking before Whom we stand makes that experience tedious and uninspiring, when in reality, it should be viewed as an opportunity of a lifetime - three times a day!

The Ramchal continues: **"To reach this fear, a man must reflect on and contemplate well three things: first, that he is actually (mamash) standing before the Creator, blessed be He, engaging in a give and take with Him, even though a man's eye does not see Him. You will observe that this is the most difficult for a person to form a true image in his heart because his senses do not at all aid in this."** (ibid. Chapter 19)

In previous generations, it was a little difficult to imagine all our actions being watched. Nowadays, that concept is all too real, as we are being spied on by our search engines and satellite maps, not to mention the plethora of security and surveillance cameras. We need to remember that even though we can't see Him, we need to use our sixth sense – a spiritual sense – to remember that He is next to us at all times, and carefully watching our every move.

The **Kotzker Rebbe**, ZT"L, pointed out that our awareness of Hashem brings Him to the forefront of our minds: "Hashem is where you let Him in." Training our minds to envision Hashem involved, caring, supportive, and attentive is the key tactic to stop the Yeitzer Hara, which wants us to forget His Presence or even existence. As such, what can we do to stir ourselves to the reality of Hashem being right next to us?

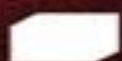
There are several ways to achieve this feat, but it requires continuous effort. One way is to keep track (maybe even a written record) of all the blessings in our lives, past and present. This also helps balance one when they feel that Hashem has abandoned them during dark moments. Another – connected – strategy is to speak constantly of the Divine Providence that transpires regularly in our lives (some people ask kids at the Shabbos table: "Where did you see Hashem this week?" to inculcate His reality into our midst.

One can practice speaking to Hashem as if He is right there, like we talk to a friend, which He is. It may be wise to do so when not around others. Finally, one should dedicate a small chunk every day to learn Mussar to refresh one's grip on these ideas and realities).

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“What’s the difference between a boss and a leader?”

A boss says, “go,” but a leader says, ‘Let’s go.’ What makes a good leader? One, a leader must possess honesty and integrity. Second, there is a need for strong communication skills, as it is the vessel that makes the requisite emotional connection possible. Third, there must be commitment/passion, since nothing drains enthusiasm quicker than a leader’s lackadaisical attitude or demeanor. Finally, there is the idea of confidence, believing in oneself and the ability to make decisions, which are crucial to effective charge-taking.

However, our Parsha outlines what Hashem outlined as the defining trait of a leader. The Midrash (Shemos Rabba 2:2) suggests that Hashem tested both Moshe Rabbeinu and David Hamelech to see if they were worthy of leading Bnei Yisrael: *“Once, while Moshe Rabbeinu was tending [his father-in-law] Yisro’s sheep, one of the lambs ran away. Moshe ran after it until it reached a small, shaded place. There, the lamb came across a pool and began to drink. As Moshe approached the lamb, he said, ‘I did not know you ran away because you were thirsty. You are so exhausted!’ He then put the lamb on his shoulders and carried him back. The Holy One said, ‘Since you tend to the sheep of human beings with such overwhelming love - by your life, I swear you shall be the shepherd of My sheep, Klal Yisrael.’”*

Dovid Hamelech also took care of his father’s flocks. Every day he, took the goats and sheep to the desert areas, so they would not graze in other people’s fields. He noticed that when the goats came to some fresh grass, the strong healthy goats would push in first, and eat up all the tender grass. solution: he penned up the big sheep while letting the small sheep out to graze first (on the “softer grass”); next, he sent the elderly sheep to graze (on the “medium” grass); finally, he released the strongest sheep to graze on the toughest grasses.

Although these are beautiful insights into the care of our righteous leaders, why are those episodes the cause of Hashem appointing Moshe and Dovid to their respective positions of Rebbe of Klal Yisrael and Jewish King? To answer, let’s start with a story. **Rav Moshe Braverman**, Shlita, relates that once he was standing outside of a grocery store in Yerushalayim at roughly 7:30 AM. A seven-year-old girl was waiting in line to pay for a loaf of bread and some milk. During the morning rush, everyone was cutting her off, but she was too shy to say anything. After 15 minutes, he was so bothered by this scene that he walked into the store to help her, only to find another young man cutting her off.

Rav Braverman asked the young man, “Don’t you see this little girl over there waiting to pay in front of you? How can you just skip ahead of her?” The young man answered, “Well, that’s the way of the world – the older people push around the younger people.” The Rav pressed, “What if it was your daughter in question – what would you say then?” Then, the Rav said, it hit him. The shepherds in the olden days saw that there was a problem that the old sheep were taking the best grass, but they did not do anything about it because it was the sheep’s problem, not THEIR problem. When Dovid came along and saw the pain in another creature – even an animal – he lived their pain as if it was his own kid. Therefore, he sought to alleviate the pain and came up with a creative idea discussed above. Hashem saw that and said, “If you’re in pain because of someone else’s pain – you deserve to be the leader of the Jewish nation.”



If one is a Jewish leader and someone comes with a problem, it is not enough to give them a Beracha (blessing) and send them on their way. We see how much the Gedolei Yisrael cry for people and it pains them so much to hear the struggles people are going through. We need to also strive on our level to care more about the pain of others. This is what Moshe taught us when he carried the thirsty sheep like a child. When a person reaches Bar Mitzvah, he becomes a guarantor for others.

As a nation, that means we don’t live on our own anymore – someone else’s pain is our pain and their Mitzvos and Aveiros affect us, too. We know that a katan (minor) is not responsible for damages or others. This is because a child lacks the ability to be responsible for others. Every day in Shacharis, we ask our Creator to “V’Ha’arev Na – Please, Hashem, make the Torah sweet in our mouths.” The word areiv also means a guarantor (all Israel are responsible for another). The word “ariev” is also related to the word, ta’aruvos, mixtures. When there is a mixture of meat and milk, the way to kasher the vessel they were in is to do hagalah (act of purging), which is related to the word, magil (disgusting).

Rabbi Yosef Elephant, Shlita, (a Maggid Shiur in Yeshivas Mir) asks why these words are connected. He answers that when something is really sweet it becomes mixed in part of you; whereas when something is disgusting, it spits out the mixture. The guarantor of the Torah to our children and the next generation is when we feel the sweetness of the Torah it then becomes mixed into our DNA which then is a guarantor that goes over to our children. Moreover, we ask Hashem that the Torah be sweet in our mouths and the mouths of Klal Yisrael, something we don’t do for any other Mitzvah.

The reason for that might be that the prerequisite for being role models to our children and making the Torah sweet to them is them seeing the leadership quality within us (*oreiv* as a guarantor). This happens when we care and pray for all our brethren, even those whom we don’t know. May our feelings for our brothers be the catalyst for our Father bringing us all back with the coming of Mashiach, speedily in our days, Amen!

In Parshas Shemos (4:22) we encounter Hashem telling Moshe Rabbeinu that all the wonders He has given him will not impress Pharaoh, and when Pharaoh refuses to listen, Moshe should tell him, “*So says Hashem, my firstborn son is Yisroel.*” How is Klal Yisroel Hashem’s firstborn son? Klal Yisroel – the Jewish people – come from Shem, who was not Noach’s firstborn son. Avraham Avinu (Sanhedrin 69b) was Terach’s firstborn son, yet we know Yitzchok was not Avraham’s firstborn son, and Yaakov was not Yitzchok’s firstborn son. Moshe himself was not a firstborn son. As such, to whom is Moshe referring?

Rashi answers this question by telling us this is an expression of greatness. This is the simple meaning, and the midrashic interpretation is: “*Here, by calling Yisroel firstborn, the Holy One, Blessed is He, affixed His seal on, thus certifying the validity of the sale of the birthright of the firstborn that Yaakov purchased from Eisav.*” That is a whole different “first-born.” Rashi is telling us that by calling Yisroel his firstborn son, he is validating what happened between Yaakov and Eisav all those years ago. We learn from this that validating something or someone is an important part of making what they are doing or feeling real.

This is a startling tool that Rashi is introducing us to, that we can use to enhance our Shalom Bayis. When something happens in our spouse’s life, we can change the way our spouse feels just by listening and validating. The importance of validating can go so far as Hashem deciding to validate the sale of the *bechora* here in Parshas Shemos

How did He accomplish this? By telling Pharaoh that this is the way it is. Yisroel is my firstborn. He stated a fact that happened. He didn’t introduce something new or give Pharaoh explanations. When our spouse expresses strong feelings, instead of offering advice and trying to “fix it” we can learn to listen and validate. Ask your spouse, “Am I understanding you correctly? Did you mean...?” Through the process of stating their feelings and being listened to and validated, we can help our spouse navigate their challenges and become stronger people.

Sometimes, spouses feel that if they don’t have all the answers, what’s the point? There is a huge benefit to listening and validating, and even if it doesn’t seem so right away, you are giving your spouse a gift - you are enabling your spouse to grow their skill of resilience. When you help your spouse process their feelings by validating them, the feelings get released and then your spouse is no longer carrying those strong spirits around. Carrying around strong unprocessed feelings can lead to overeating, sudden explosions, and other unhealthy outlets. Let us make a supreme effort to emulate Hashem and connect to our spouse through listening and validating. The dividends are worth the effort. May Hashem fill our homes with the light of Shalom Bayis!

Rabbi Yitz Greenfield MS, MFT is a renowned speaker and a Torah-based marriage counselor. For questions or feedback, contact Rabbi Greenfield at RabbiGreenfield@gmail.com, visit TorahMarriage.com, or find his classes at TorahAnytime.com

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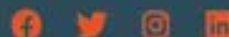
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