

# RABBI GOLDBERG'S *Parsha Perspectives* FOR TODAY

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Shemos for your Shabbos Table  
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Sponsored by Eli & Sara Malka Neger as a zechus for a refuah shleima for Chaya Esther Tehila bas Arielle Tsiporah and lilui nishmas Yitzchok Moshe ben Aaron Yaakov Yehoshua.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE FRIDAY NIGHT MEAL

### The Thankless Job

Parshas Shemos tells of the heroism of Shifra and Pu'a – *Benei Yisrael's* midwives who defied Pharaoh's command to kill every newborn boy. In reward for their courageous decision to keep the boys alive, the Torah tells, ויעש להם בתים – God "made homes for them" (1:21).

Rashi, based on the Gemara in Maseches Sota, explains the word בתים ("homes") in this *pasuk* as a reference to dynasties. These women were Yocheved and Miriam – Moshe's mother and sister – and the dynasties of the *kehuna*, *leviya*, and kingship descended from them. Yocheved was Levi's daughter, and thus the *kohanim* and *Leviyim* descended from her, while the royal line of David Ha'melech descended from Miriam.

Why was this the reward for the midwives' heroism? God normally rewards מידה כנגד המידה, in a manner that resembles the deed that was performed. Why was the midwives' refusal to kill the infants rewarded specifically with the dynasties of leadership?

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Megged Yosef*, answers this question by noting the previous *pasuk*: ויטב אלוקים למיילדות, וירב – "God brought goodness upon the midwives; the nation multiplied and became exceedingly numerous." The Torah seems to interrupt the story of God's reward to the midwives by telling us of the nation's continued, rapid population growth. Rav Sorotzkin explains that the phrase וירב העם ויעצמו מאד implies that this was the midwives' greatest reward – seeing *Benei Yisrael's* sustained growth. Their sole concern was the wellbeing of their people; they were not interested at all in any sort of personal reward. The satisfaction of seeing that וירב העם ויעצמו מאד, that *Benei Yisrael* continued growing, with more and more healthy babies being born, provided them with more joy and satisfaction than any reward could have possibly provided.

When Hashem saw the midwives' selflessness, how their display of courage and self-sacrifice was intended solely for the benefit of the nation, without any ulterior motives, and without any desire for fame or recognition, ויעש להם בתים

– He decided that the nation's leadership would descend from these women. The most important quality of a leader is sincerity, a genuine devotion to the people, without any interest in "kickbacks" or prestige. A true leader feels rewarded by seeing his success, by witnessing the benefit he brings to the people under his charge. He does not need any feedback, praise, compliments or public recognition. And so Hashem wanted the leadership of *Benei Yisrael* to emerge from Shifra and Pu'a, the two women who wanted nothing in return for their self-sacrifice other than the joy of seeing the fruits of their labor.

There are many "thankless jobs" that involve a great deal of work, and tend to invite complaints and criticism, instead of compliments and praise. Personally, in my experience, I am privileged to receive warm, positive feedback for my efforts, but many rabbis do not. The role of *gabbai* in shul is notorious for its thanklessness; the *gabbai* puts in time and effort to ensure that everything runs smoothly, but receives only complaints when he forgot to give someone *aliya*, without ever receiving a compliment. When one chooses to serve in any sort of leadership position, he must go into it expecting nothing in return. These roles demand an attitude like Shifra and Pu'a's – seeing the success of one's work as enough of a reward, such that no fame or recognition is needed.

### Amram's Model of Humility

Later (2:1), the Torah tells of the marriage of Moshe's parents – Amram and Yocheved.

The Gemara in Maseches Sota (12a) teaches that this actually refers to Amram and Yocheved's second wedding. After Pharaoh decreed that all the newborn boys should be cast into the river, Amram decided to divorce his wife, figuring that there was no longer any reason to beget children. As he was the religious leader of his time, everyone else followed suit, and divorced. But Amram was then confronted by his daughter, Miriam, who was just a young girl – around four years old – at the time. She challenged her father's decision, claiming that his move was even worse than Pharaoh's decree. After all, Pharaoh decreed death only upon the boys, whereas Amram was

preventing the birth of both boys and girls. Moreover, Pharaoh decreed only physical death, while Amram was causing infants to never be born and thus not have the opportunity to earn a share in the next world. Amram accepted his daughter's criticism, and married Yocheved a second time. Once again, the rest of the nation followed his example, and remarried.

Amram here sets for us an inspiring, and ever so critical, model of humility. Let us imagine a prominent leader who sits for hours with his committee to discuss the situation and decide upon the appropriate course of action. Finally, a decision is reached. The leader goes home and speaks about the decision with his family, and his four-year-old daughter starts asking questions. She argues that the decision was wrong, explaining why she thinks it is a terrible idea. We can easily imagine the man gently and lovingly running his hand along her cheeks, smiling, and saying, "My sweet girl, thank you for your concern, but the committee decided that this is the best thing to do." He would think it is cute that his daughter chimes in, but would not take her input all that seriously... We could hardly imagine him reconvening the committee to announce that he changed his mind after hearing what his four-year-old had to say about the issue...

Amram shows us the importance of humbly accepting criticism and ideas from other people, no matter who they are. We have what to learn and gain from all people – yes, even young children. Too often, our ego gets in the way of our growth process. We feel too proud to change our behavior or our opinions because of what we hear from somebody whom we regard as inferior to us. If Amram, the religious leader of *Benei Yisrael* at the time, could learn from his four-year-old daughter, then we certainly have much to learn from all people, no matter who they are.

## DVAR TORAH FOR THE SHABBOS DAY MEAL

### Violence is Never Justified

After Moshe grew up, he went out to observe *Benei Yisrael's* plight, and he witnessed an Egyptian beating a helpless slave. Moshe promptly struck the Egyptian, killing him. The next day, he saw two days fighting, *ויאמר לרשע למה*, – "and he said to the wicked one: Why do you strike your fellow?" (2:13).

Rav Yosef Sorotzkin, in *Megged Yosef*, raises the question of why Moshe concluded that this fellow was a *רשע*, an evil person, even before receiving his answer. Already when posing to the man the question as to why he was beating his fellow, Moshe assumed that this was the guilty party, without giving him a chance to explain his behavior.

Evidently, Rav Sorotzkin explains, there is never any justification for striking a fellow Jew. It did not matter at all what the background was, what drove the man to beat the other person – such behavior is never justified. Indeed, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 58b) infers from this episode, *המגביה, המגביה, ידו על חבירו...נקרא רשע* – one who raises his hand to strike his fellow is instantly considered a *רשע*. No matter the reason, violence is never justified.

Rav Sorotzkin here condemns those self-proclaimed *kannaim* (zealots) who act violently toward fellow Jews of whose behavior or opinions they disapprove, ostensibly *לשם שמיים*. They defend their violence by saying that they are fighting for Hashem's honor, but this is wrong. No matter how strongly we disagree and disapprove, there is never any excuse or justification for laying a hand on a fellow Jew.

## DVAR TORAH FOR SHALOSH SEUDOS

### Crediting Hashem

After the word spread that Moshe had killed an Egyptian, Moshe was forced to flee from Egypt, and he arrived in Midyan. There he witnessed the scene of shepherds harassing Yisro's seven daughters at a well. Moshe drove the shepherds away and drew water for the young women's herds.

When Yisro's daughters returned home, they reported to their father what had happened, telling him, *איש מצרי הצילנו* – "An Egyptian man saved us from the hands of the shepherds" (2:19).

The Midrash (*Shemos Rabba* 1:32) raises the question of why Yisro's daughters described Moshe as an *איש מצרי* – "an Egyptian man." Was this who Moshe was? Did he really dress as an Egyptian?

The Midrash answers by offering a fascinating explanation of this *pasuk*. After Moshe rescued the women, they started praising him, calling him a hero. Moshe responded, *אותו מצרי שהרגתי, הוא הציל אתכם* – "That Egyptian whom I killed, he saved you." Rather than take credit for rescuing them, Moshe directed their attention to the extraordinary sequence of events that led him to be present at the well so that he could help them. It was only because of the *איש מצרי*, the Egyptian man whom Moshe had observed beating a slave, and whom he then proceeded to kill, that Moshe ended up fleeing to Midyan and was thus in a position to rescue Yisro's daughters from the harassment of the local shepherds. And thus *איש מצרי הצילנו* – the women were saved by the Egyptian man whom Moshe had killed, on account of which he needed to run to Midyan.

Rav Yisroel Meir Druck infers from the Midrash an important lesson about appreciating God's role in everything we accomplish. So many different things need to fall into place for us to succeed in anything, for us to achieve anything. If we find ourselves in a position to help somebody, or to do something meaningful, we should not take all the credit. We need to open our eyes and appreciate all that Hashem has done to enable us to achieve all that we are able to achieve, all the assistance that He grants, and His having placed us in a position to accomplish the great things that we are privileged to accomplish. We cannot take all the credit for our achievements; we must feel a keen sense of gratitude for all Hashem has done to enable us to do all that we do.