



Parshat HaShavuah

שמות
SHMOT
 JANUARY 5, 2013
 כ"ג טבת תשע"ג

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Ashreinu

חלקינו מה טוב

Candle Lighting

5:25

S"Z Kriat Shema

9:47

Sunset

5:43

Motzei
 Shabbat

6:21



Enriching and Enhancing Your Study of the Weekly Torah Portion

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JEWISH LEADERSHIP: A MATTER OF FATE

RABBI ALLAN HOUBEN

Parshat Shmot introduces us to Moshe, the man and then the leader. We observe Moshe's birth, as his family did, with anticipation and expectation, we see his identity crisis, and we eventually witness his reluctant ascension to leader of the Jewish people.

Deep within these episodes lies the essence of who Moshe is as a person and a leader, and arguably the roots of all Jewish leadership—its successes and failures.

After spending a few years with his biological parents, Moshe grows up in the palace and is raised by Pharaoh's daughter. When Moshe leaves the palace to explore, the Torah offers us three snapshots that give us a window into his personality. In episode I, Moshe rushes to the aid of the Israelite being beaten by the Egyptian taskmaster. In episode II he tries to stop the conflict between two Israelites. Finally, after fleeing to Midian, in episode III, he comes to the aid of complete strangers and saves them from their attackers. The common thread in these stories is that Moshe comes to the aid of others; he is a protector, a defender, and, in the words of the Torah itself, he is a savior: "*va'yoshian*" (2:17). That Moshe identifies with the plight of the oppressed, the underdog, is what makes him ideal to lead—be it a flock of sheep or a nation of people.

Hashem calls upon Moshe at the burning bush to lead a downtrodden nation of underdogs, and yet Moshe is reluctant. Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks points out that while most of Moshe's hesitation has to do with his lack of faith in his own abilities as a leader, one of his refusals to accept the position is based on his lack of faith in B'nei Yisrael, that they will not listen to or follow him: "*v'hein lo ya'aminu li v'lo yishmiu b'koli*" (4:1).

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ONE WAY OR ANOTHER LILLY KATZ ('14)

Following his upbringing in the Egyptian palace, Moshe goes into the field and sees an Egyptian killing a Jew: "He looked this way and that way, and when he saw there was no man (*ish*) he smote the Egyptian" (2:12). The literal interpretation is that Moshe looks to see if anyone is watching and with the coast clear, he defends his fellow Jew. But this seemingly simple text is not so simple. In the midst of a busy working field, it is doubtful that no one was around.

With this in mind, the Netziv takes a different approach towards the pasuk. Moshe, watching a Jew being beaten by an Egyptian, looks to see if any Egyptian would stand up for him. In the absence of Egyptian or worldly justice, Moshe reacts. All too frequently the world is silent as Jews are attacked.

Rav Ya'akov Zvi Mecklenberg interprets this tale differently. Moshe understands that no Egyptian will come forward. However, he looks to see whether any Jew would care enough to save his brother. When no Jew does, Moshe kills the Egyptian. Tragically, too often, even in contemporary times, Jews do not care for their fellow Jews.

There is one other approach. Moshe is raised in an Egyptian home, but is nursed by his biological Jewish mother. Consequently, Moshe is unsure who he really is. When seeing an Egyptian inflicting pain upon a Jew, he looks within himself to ascertain whether he should help the Egyptian or defend the Jew. Therefore, the real meaning of "he looked this way and that way" is that he looks within himself to see who he really is—Egyptian or Jew. When he fully grasps that he has not firmly established his identity, he makes a decision—he smites the Egyptian part of himself and declares: "I am a Jew."

At a certain point, it is crucial for each of us to stop wavering, and to identify ourselves boldly and clearly.

When we find ourselves in a place where there is no *ish*, it is necessary that each of us step up as Moshe did to make the difference. To paraphrase our rabbis, in a place where there are no *anashim*, become the *ish*. (Avot 2:6).


PRECIOUS MOMENTS GABRIELLA SOBOL ('13)

In this week's parsha there is the famous story of two midwives, Shifra and Puah, who save the Jewish boys despite Pharaoh's decree to kill them. Rashi comments that these two women are actually Yocheved and Miriam. Yocheved is nicknamed "Shifra" because she beautifies the babies, while Miriam is nicknamed "Puah" because she coos and calms the infants.

Why are these women given nicknames that describe how they care for the babies? Would it not be more appropriate to give them names more fitting of their heroic act of saving the babies? Perhaps Hatzalah and Teshuah?

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Sobol continued

Rabbi Frand explains that true greatness becomes evident in the little things people do—these little things are what reveal one’s true character and commitment. Many people can find the strength to perform a singular act of heroism; however, genuine greatness is only achieved when one performs acts that are small and hidden but extraordinary. Not only did these women manage to save these babies, they even put in the extra mile and soothed and beautified the babies—that was their true greatness.

There is a story in the gemara of Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma. When a fellow Rabbi asked him if he did anything worthy of being elevated in the next world, he said that once his regular money and charity money got mixed up in his pocket, so he gave both to charity—this was his ticket to World to Come. Yet this Rabbi taught Torah to hundreds of students, defying Roman decrees not to do so! But in the end, it was a small act that allowed him to enter the World to Come.

True greatness is not found in a once-in-a-lifetime act, but rather in a lifetime filled with small but meaningful deeds.

YOUR MOUTH

CASEY WINDERBAUM (‘16)

In this week’s parsha, Hashem has a conversation with Moshe where He tries to convince Moshe to take מצרים out of בני ישראל. But Moshe is reluctant to assume any position higher than his brother, Aharon. Moshe states, "לא איש דברים אנכי...כי כבד פה וכבד לשון אנכי," — "I am not a man of words, for I have speech problems and am tongue-tied." Hashem answers Moshe by saying, "מי שם פה לאדם"— "who gave man a mouth?"

This can give each and every one of us a bit of guidance and inspiration for our daily lives. Take the following example: You have to get up early in the morning to get to school on time...you feel a sense of laziness as you begin to daven; you can barely "open your mouth in prayer."

One solution to this everyday struggle is to focus on doing teshuva which will empower us with a "fresher" נשמה. The idea of teshuva is hinted to in our פסוק. Several ספרים discuss that the word "מי," relates to teshuva. The question "מי מטהר אתכם" — "who purifies you?" can also be read as "the word מי purifies you"; the concept of purification here refers to teshuva.

So, if we find ourselves "כבד פה וכבד לשון," if we find ourselves tongue-tied and we can hardly open our mouths in prayer, then we can focus on what Hashem said to Moshe: "מי שם פה לאדם" let "מי" (teshuva) give you back your mouth.



SANCTITY OF LIFE KIMBERLY KUGELMAN ('14)

This week's parsha begins with Pharaoh enslaving the children of Israel and ordering the Hebrew midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill all baby boys at birth. But "the midwives feared Hashem and they did not do as the King of Egypt spoke, and they caused the children to live" (1:17).

Rabbi Moshe Bogomilsky asks the following question: The words "and they caused the children to live" seem extra. If the midwives did not listen to Pharaoh, is it not obvious that the children lived?

With every birth there is the possibility that the child will die of natural causes. Shifra and Puah feared that during the time of Pharaoh's decree to kill any Jewish baby boy a child would die and the mother would accuse them of obeying Pharaoh. Being the righteous women they were, they prayed to Hashem, and through their prayers they "caused the children to live"—even those who would have died naturally at birth.

It was Shifra and Puah's commitment to preserving human life and their skills as midwives that provided the safe and secret delivery of Jewish children.

Rabbi Allan Houben continued

For this refusal Moshe is punished; he is immediately told to put his hand in his cloak and when he removes it his hand is covered in *tzara'at*, a punishment most often associated with speaking *lashon hara*. This, Rabbi Sacks says, is conveying to us a very important message about Jewish leadership: "a leader does not need faith in himself, but he must have faith in the people he is to lead." A leader must be "one who identifies with his or her people, mindful of their faults, to be sure, but convinced also of their potential greatness and their preciousness in the sight of Hashem."

Moshe from the start has the ability to identify with the plight of the Israelites, as the Torah testifies: "*va'yar b'sivlotam*" and not *et sivlotam*. He is emotionally invested in them, in helping them, in changing their status quo, but he also possesses the fatal flaw of a Jewish leader—the same flaw that ultimately leads to Moshe handing over the reigns to Yehoshua before entering Eretz Yisrael and that requires Eliyahu to pass the mantle of leadership to Elisha. Both Moshe and Eliyahu lose touch with and thus faith in the people they are to lead, and they are replaced by consummate men of the people, who are guaranteed to see the good in the people and advocate on their behalf.

Upon waking up each day, we thank Hashem for giving us a new day—a new opportunity to make the most of our lives, a new beginning. This is no small gift. But, it is perhaps what is behind this gift that makes Hashem the ultimate example of what Jewish leadership is. At the end of *Modeh Ani* we say "*rabba emunateCHA*"—"great is your faith." It is Hashem's faith in our ability to do better today than we did yesterday, to overlook our faults and mistakes and focus on our potential, which drives Him to give us a new day over and over again. This is the heart of Jewish leadership as modeled daily by Hashem. Success as a Jewish leader is ultimately a matter of faith.

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