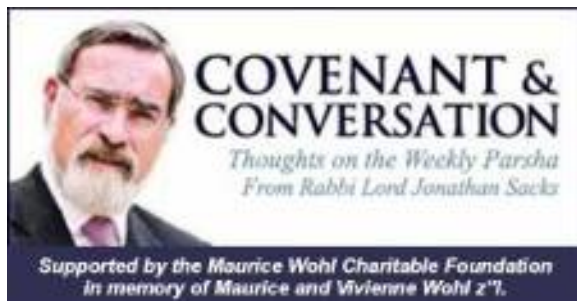


In this Issue

- **Covenant and Conversation** by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks
- **M'oray Ha'Aish** by Rabbi Ari Kahn
- **Rabbi Frand on the Weekly Torah Portion** by Rabbi Yissocher Frand
- **Between the Lines** by Rabbi Abba Wagensberg



On Leadership: Women as Leaders

This week's parsha could be entitled "The birth of a leader." We see Moses, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter, growing up as a prince of Egypt. We see him as a young man, for the first time realising the implications of his true identity. He is, and knows he is, a member of an enslaved and suffering people: "Growing up, he went out to where his own people were and watched them at their hard labour. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his own people" (Ex. 2: 10).

He intervenes. He acts: the mark of a true leader. We see him intervene three times, twice in Egypt, once in Midian, to rescue victims of violence. We then witness the great scene at the burning bush where God summons him to lead his people to freedom. Moses hesitates four times until God becomes angry and Moses knows he has no other choice. This is a classic account of the childhood of a hero.

But this is only the surface. The Torah is a deep and subtle book, and it does not always deliver its message on the surface. Just beneath is another and far more remarkable story, not about a hero but about six heroines, six courageous women without whom there would not have been a Moses.

First is Yocheved, wife of Amram and mother of the three people who were to become the great leaders of

the Israelites: Miriam, Aaron and Moses himself. It was Yocheved who, at the height of Egyptian persecution, had the courage to have a child, hide him for three months, and then devise a plan to give him a chance of being rescued. We know all too little of Yocheved. In her first appearance in the Torah she is unnamed. Yet, reading the narrative, we are left in no doubt about her bravery and resourcefulness. Not by accident did her children all become leaders.

The second was Miriam, Yocheved's daughter and Moses' elder sister. It was she who kept watch over the child as the ark floated down the river, and who approached Pharaoh's daughter with the suggestion that he be nursed among his own people. The biblical text paints a portrait of the young Miriam as a figure of unusual fearlessness and presence of mind. Rabbinic tradition went further. In a remarkable midrash, we read of how the young Miriam confronted her father Amram and persuaded him to change his mind. Hearing of the decree that every male Israelite baby would be drowned in the river, Amram led the Israelites in divorcing their wives so that there would be no more children. He had logic on his side. Could it be right to bring children into the world if there were a fifty per cent chance that they would be killed at birth? Yet Miriam, so the tradition goes, remonstrated with him. "Your decree," she said, "is worse than Pharaoh's. His affects only the boys; yours affects all. His deprives children of life in this world; yours will deprive them of life even in the world to come." Amram relented, and as a result, Moses was born.¹

The implication is clear: Miriam had more faith than her father.

Third and fourth were the two midwives, Shifrah and Puah, who frustrated Pharaoh's first attempt at genocide. Told to kill the male Israelite children at birth, they "feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live" (Ex. 1: 17). Summoned and accused of disobedience, they outwitted Pharaoh by constructing an ingenious cover story: the Hebrew women, they said, are vigorous and give birth before we arrive. They escaped punishment and saved lives.

The significance of this story is that it is the first recorded instance of one of Judaism's greatest contributions to civilization: the idea that there are moral limits to power. There are instructions that should not be obeyed. There are crimes against humanity that cannot be excused by the claim that

“I was only obeying orders.” This concept, generally known as “civil disobedience,” is usually attributed to the nineteenth century American writer Henry David Thoreau, and entered international consciousness after the Holocaust and the Nuremberg trials. Its true origin, though, lay thousands of years earlier in the actions of two women, Shifra and Puah. Through their understated courage they earned a high place among the moral heroes of history, teaching us the primacy of conscience over conformity, the law of justice over the law of the land.²

The fifth is Zipporah, Moses’s wife. The daughter of a Midianite priest, she was nonetheless determined to accompany Moses on his mission to Egypt, despite the fact that she had no reason to risk her life on such a hazardous venture. In a deeply enigmatic passage, it was she who saved Moses’s life by performing a circumcision on their son (Ex. 4: 24-26). The impression we have of her is of a figure of monumental determination who, at a crucial moment, has a better sense than Moses himself of what God requires.

I have saved until last the most intriguing of them all: Pharaoh’s daughter. It was she who had the courage to rescue an Israelite child and bring it up as her own in the very palace where her father was plotting the destruction of the Israelite people. Could we imagine a daughter of Hitler, or Eichmann, or Stalin, doing the same? There is something at once heroic and gracious about this lightly sketched figure, the woman who gave Moses his name.

Who was she? The Torah does not give her a name. However the First Book of Chronicles (4: 18) mentions a daughter of Pharaoh, named Bitya, and it was she the sages identified as the woman who saved Moses. The name Bitya (sometimes rendered as Batya) means “the daughter of God.” From this, the sages drew one of their most striking lessons:

The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her: “Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. You are not My daughter, but I shall call you My daughter.”³

They added that she was one of the few (tradition enumerates nine) who were so righteous that they entered paradise in their lifetime.⁴

So, on the surface, the parsha is about the initiation into leadership of one remarkable man, but just beneath the surface is a counter-narrative of six extraordinary women without whom there would not

have been a Moses. They belong to a long tradition of strong women throughout Jewish history, from Deborah, Hannah, Ruth and Esther in the Bible to more modern figures like Sarah Schenirer and Nechama Leibowitz to more secular figures like Anne Frank, Hannah Senesh and Golda Meir.

How then, if women emerge so powerfully as leaders, were they excluded in Jewish law from certain leadership roles? If we look carefully we will see that women were historically excluded from two areas. One was the “crown of priesthood,” which went to Aaron and his sons. The other was the “crown of kingship,” which went to David and his sons. These were two roles built on the principle of dynastic succession. From the third crown – the “crown of Torah” – however, women were not excluded. There were prophetesses, not just prophets. The sages enumerated seven of them. There were great women Torah scholars from the Mishnaic period (Beruriah, Ima Shalom) to today.

At stake is a more general distinction. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron in his Responsa, *Binyan Av*, differentiates between formal or official authority (*samchut*) and actual leadership (*hanhagah*).⁵ There are figures who hold positions of authority – prime ministers, presidents, CEOs – who may not be leaders at all. They may have the power to force people to do what they say, but they have no followers. They excite no admiration. They inspire no emulation. And there may be leaders who hold no official position at all but who are turned to for advice and are held up as role models. They have no power but great influence. Israel’s prophets belonged to this category. So, often, did the *gedolei Yisrael*, the great sages of each generation. Neither Rashi nor Maimonides held any official position (some scholars say that Maimonides was chief rabbi of Egypt but most hold that he was not, though his descendants were). Wherever leadership depends on personal qualities – what Max Weber called charismatic authority – and not on office or title, there is no distinction between women and men.

Yocheved, Miriam, Shifra, Puah, Zipporah and Batya were leaders not because of any official position they held (in the case of Batya she was a leader *despite* her official title as a princess of Egypt). They were leaders because they had courage and conscience. They refused to be intimidated by power or defeated by circumstance. They were the real heroes of the

exodus. Their courage is still a source of inspiration today.

1. Shemot Rabbah 1: 13.
2. There is, of course, a midrashic tradition that Shifra and Puah were other names for Yocheved and Miriam. In the text I am following the interpretation given by Abarbanel and Luzzatto.
3. Vayikra Rabbah 1: 3.
4. Derekh Eretz Zuta 1.
5. Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, *Responsa Binyan Av* 2nd edn., no. 65.



Fathers and Sons

The book of Shmot begins with a word that links it to the Book of Bereishit:

And these are the names of the sons
of Israel who came to Egypt with
Jacob, every man with his
household.

The Book of Shmot could have, even should have begun with "These are the names", a statement delineating a new start; the term "and these" points us back to the end of the previous book. Moreover, the list of the sons of Ya'akov which comprises the first verses of Shmot was already enumerated, and in greater detail, in the final verses of the Book of Bereishit (see chapter 46).

Reuven, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,
Yissachar, Zevulun, and Benjamin,
Dan, and Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.
And all the souls who came from
the loins of Jacob were seventy
souls; for Yosef was in Egypt
already. And Yosef died, and all his
brothers, and all that generation.
(Shmot 1:1-6)

At the end of the list in Shmot we are told that Yosef, his brothers, and the entire generation pass away.

This, too, presents the reader with a problem, for Yosef's death was already reported in the concluding verse in Bereishit. Why should Yosef's passing, though surely not insignificant, be reported twice? The entire verse could have been composed far more economically, had it simply stated that the entire generation perished; certainly, the reader would understand this to include Yosef and the brothers. Why does the Torah enumerate each one?

These questions have been raised by the traditional commentaries, and each focus on various connections between this new book and the previous one to explain the peculiar phrase with which Shmot opens. The Ramban, in his introduction to the Book of Shmot, sets down some general principles regarding the basic nature of each of the two books, Bereishit and Shmot. Here is a paraphrase of his introduction:

The Book of Bereishit, which is thus completed, is the book of creation. The creation refers to both the physical world and the patriarchs, whose very deeds are also a type of creation because they influence and determine the actions of their descendants in the future. Now that the book of creations has been completed we can begin the book of the actions which were hinted at in the previous book. This is the book of redemption, which is not complete until the children of Israel physically and spiritually leave their exile, and return to the spiritual level of the patriarchs. This is only accomplished when the Mishkan is completed and the Sh'china envelops the building. For the patriarchs are the chariot.¹

One of the major principles of exegesis employed by the Ramban is the idea that history repeats itself: Jewish history is Jewish destiny. Actions that at first seem random are actually powerful determinates of future episodes. Thus, the Book of Bereishit, a book of beginnings, is actually the foundation for future events. In this same sense, the "book of creation" refers to the physical creation by God and the spiritual infrastructure laid down by the forefathers.

This would explain the linguistic linkage between the books, evidenced by that opening phrase "*And these are the names...*": Bereishit, the book of the fathers, is a book of theory, a book which contains the *sui*

generis creation of both the physical world and the spiritual paradigms by which that world operates. Bereishit is a book of prototypes, whereas Shmot presents the application of those principles; it is a book of actions. The two books are so closely connected, then, that the linguistic continuation now seems perfectly natural.

Still, the repetitions in the text remain unexplained, especially regarding the death of Yosef, which was mentioned only seven verses earlier, albeit in a separate book. One might assume that literary considerations hold sway in this case: The repetition is necessary for a smooth transition into the next section and as an explanation as to how Yosef was forgotten:

And the people of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty; and the land was filled with them. And there arose up a new king over Egypt, who knew not Yosef.

This is certainly a tenable solution; however there may be a deeper reason why Yosef's passing would necessarily be as integral a part of the Book of Bereishit as it is a part of Shmot.

We have established that the book of Bereishit is the book of the fathers. A basic tenet of our knowledge, even of our identity, is the concept of the Three Forefathers. The question we might ask at this juncture is, what are we to make of Yosef? Is he to be counted among the other sons of Ya'akov, or is he something more?

One major, if not *the* major theme of the last few parshiot, is the relationship between Yosef and the brothers. On the one hand, we are made aware of a favored status enjoyed by Yosef; on the other hand we are told of the jealousy and enmity that raged amongst the brothers because of this favoritism. While in earlier chapters the favoritism was symbolized by the coat of many colors, in Vay'chi the double portion received by Yosef clarified the precise nature of the favoritism. The reader, even at a very great distance, cannot help but feel uncomfortable with the double portion Yosef receives, especially when considered against the backdrop of the Torah's later legislation against such behavior:

If a man has two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have borne him children, both

the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son is hers who was hated, then it shall be, when he makes his sons inherit that which he has, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, who is indeed the firstborn; But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he has; for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. (Devarim 21:15-17)

According to those who opine that the forefathers observed all Torah laws, this would clearly be problematic. Even if this law is seen in its chronological context, having been set down years later, it still seems to strike a theological blow to Ya'akov's esteem — to have something he did legislated as unacceptable. Moreover, the reference to Ya'akov is unmistakable: the language used in formulation of this law parallels Ya'akov's blessing to Reuven, the spurned firstborn:

"Reuven, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power."
(Bereishit 49:3)

The key to resolving this conflict lies in understanding why a firstborn receives a double portion. Various rationales have been put forward to explain this law.² One explanation is that the eldest, who often bears the most responsibility, becomes a surrogate parent when looking after the younger siblings. Thus, the Talmud understands that the verse requiring one to honor one's parents includes an oldest sibling:

...It was taught: 'Honor thy father and thy mother,' 'thy father' includes 'thy stepmother,' and 'thy mother' includes 'thy stepfather', and the superfluous *vav* includes 'thy elder brother'... [Ketuvot 103a]

The oldest brother is seen as a surrogate parent and, as such, he receives the double portion as payment for his efforts. The commentaries explain that Reuven did not live up to his responsibilities, hence Ya'akov was justified in taking away the double portion and dividing it in what he felt was a more

equitable fashion. Daat Zekanim Baalei Tosfot, and Seforno, add that Ya'akov did not merely "write Reuven out of the will". Ya'akov had already rejected Reuven earlier in his lifetime, as a response to Reuven's less-than-satisfactory behavior; therefore Ya'akov's favoring Yosef over Reuven does not constitute an affront to the law regarding inheritance for the son of the less-favored wife. Reuven "earned" his status himself, rather than being a victim of his mother's inferior standing.

When we consider the difference between Yosef and Reuven we realize that it was Yosef who really cared for his brothers, and not Reuven. Yosef was known as the "great provider". In fact, we may say that Yosef cared for more people for a longer time than anyone in Tanach! (see Bereishit 42:6, 45:10-11, 47:12, 50:21) Yosef was a father figure for his entire extended family; indeed, he was the provider for all of Egypt and the entire region (Bereishit 41:56,57). Apparently, Par'oh recognized this attribute in Yosef at their first meeting:

And he made him to ride in his second chariot; and they cried before him, 'Avrech'; and he made him ruler over all the land of Egypt. (Bereishit 41:43)

The term *Avrech* is unclear; some (including Rashi) connect it to *berech* – knee. Par'oh ordered all who saw him to prostrate themselves before Yosef. Rashi offers two other explanations, the first based on the Targum: He called Yosef 'father to the king'. The term *Avrech*, then, indicates wisdom. Alternatively, Rashi suggests, Par'oh sensed something paternal in Yosef, and he described it with a term that relates to a fatherhood of sorts, a conglomeration of the words *av* (father) and *rach* (young or tender): *av l'chochma v'rach l'shanim*. Yosef was a father in terms of wisdom while yet a young man chronologically.

Similarly, Ya'akov's parting blessing to Yosef contains an analogous observation:

Yosef is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him, and shot at him, and hated him; But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; from there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. (Bereishit 49:22-24)

The last term, *even yisrael* is translated as "stone of Israel", yet Rashi teaches that the term *even* is actually a combination of *av* and *ben*, father and son. This is the essence of Yosef: he is both a father and a son. His avocation of provider for others makes him into a father, while biologically he remains a son. This describes the complexity of Yosef. This tension between his dual roles emerges in another episode in Vay'chi. When Ya'akov bequeaths the double portion to Yosef, as befitting a firstborn, the gift is not merely monetary – it is far more profound and far-reaching:

And now your two sons, Ephraim and Menashe, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you to Egypt, are mine; as Reuven and Shimon, they shall be mine. (Bereishit 48:5)

If Yosef's sons become like Ya'akov's other son's, enjoying a similar status, where does that leave Yosef? Is he of the same stature as his brothers or has he achieved the status of his father? In a sense, he is both. He is *even*, at once a father and a son.

This observation gives us greater insight into the struggle between Yosef and the other brothers. The brothers saw Yosef as their father's favorite; in truth, he was more than that. Yosef had transcended his generation, achieving a status similar to that of the previous generation.

These are the generations of Jacob. Yosef. (Bereishit 37:2)

Yosef was an extension of his father, not a separate generation, not a separate entity. Yosef chastised his brothers as a father would; Yosef cared for his brothers as a father would. Reuven never achieved this status. He attempted to show that he was like his father, but in a superficial, perverse, even obscene manner:

And it came to pass, when Yisrael lived in that land, that Reuven went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Yisrael heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve. (Bereishit 35:22)

Reuven's attempts to imitate his father were pathetic: not by caring for his brothers, but by taking his father's concubine. By doing so, he forfeited his unique status:

Reuven, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power; Unstable as water, you shall not excel; because you went up to your father's bed; then defiled you it; he went up to my couch. (Bereishit 49:3,4)

Ya'akov takes Yosef's sons as his own. Reuven, on the other hand, sees his own sons as being distanced from Ya'akov – and perhaps even from himself:

And Reuven spoke to his father, saying, 'Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to you; deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to you again.' [42:37]

Reuven did not conduct himself as a firstborn; he did not take care of his brothers. Instead, he made superficial attempts to stake his claim: He imitated his father in the realm that he should not have, and failed to emulate him in the realms he should have.

Yosef, though, is both a father and a son; a strange status. Is he equal to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Ya'akov, or is he simply unequal to his own brothers? What is this unique position of *even Yisrael*, of being both *av* and *ben*?

When we invite the *Ushpizin* to visit us on Sukkot, Yosef is among them, indicating an association with one of the mystical *sefirot* and a status which eludes all his brothers. There is even a rabbinic source that introduces Yosef as if he is one of the Patriarchs:

Another exposition of the text, The fruit of the Hadar tree. Hadar symbolizes Avraham, whom the Holy One, blessed be He, honored (hiddero) with good old age; as it says, And Avraham was old, well-on in age (Bereishit 24:1), and it is written, And honor (v'hadarta) the face of the old man (Vayikra 19, 32). Branches (kapot) of palm-trees symbolizes Yitzchak who had been tied (kafut) and bound upon the altar. And boughs of thick trees symbolizes Ya'akov; just as the myrtle is crowded with leaves so was Ya'akov crowded with

children. And willows of the brook symbolizes Yosef; as the willow wilts before the other three species, so Yosef died before his brethren. Another exposition of the text, The fruit of the hadar tree. Hadar symbolizes Sarah whom the Holy One, blessed be He, honored (hidderah) with a good old age; as it says, Now Avraham and Sarah were old (Bereishit 18:11). Branches of palm-trees symbolizes Rivka; just as the palm-tree contains eatable fruit as well as prickles, so Rivka brought forth a righteous man and a wicked one. And boughs of thick trees symbolizes Leah; just as the myrtle is crowded with leaves so was Leah crowded with children. And willows of the brook symbolizes Rachel; just as the willow wilts before the other three species, so Rachel died before her sister. (Midrash Rabbah – Vayikra 30,10)

Despite this elevated status, Yosef is not, in the final analysis, considered one of the *Avot* per se.³ Using the mystical allusion referred to by the Ramban, Yosef does not become the fourth wheel of the Divine Chariot. Yosef's status is as an extension of Ya'akov, not that of an individual *Av*. The fourth wheel is a status reserved for King David:

We have learnt that the patriarchs are the "holy chariot", and a chariot consists of not less than four. We have further learnt that God joined King David with them so as to form a complete chariot. [Zohar, Bereishit, Page 248b]

We should not fail to note that Yosef is the first one in the Torah who is seen riding in a chariot (Bereishit 41:43). Furthermore, the Hebrew term for chariot – *merkava* - has as its root *R(esh) C(haf) B(et)*, the same three letters which form the word *B(e)C(ho)R* – the Hebrew for firstborn- as well as *B(e)R(a)C(h)* the Hebrew for "blessing", and *B(e)R(e)Ch*, "knee" - all themes associated with Yosef.⁴ These three letters are all "seconds", the *Bet* is the second in the single digit letters, the *Caf* is the second in the tens, and the *Resh* is the second in the

hundreds. The numerical value of each of these related words, then, is identical: 222. In other words, the true *bechor* (firstborn) sees himself as a continuation or extension of something which already exists, and not a creation *sui generis*. His very nature is an extension of the father; not a replacement of the father, as Reuven perhaps thought, but an extension.

Now we know why the book of Bereishit, the Book of the Fathers, had to end with the death of Yosef: On one level, Yosef was one of the fathers, or at the very least, an extension of Ya'akov. The Book of the Fathers would have been incomplete had the circle of Yosef's life been left unclosed. On the other hand, the book of Shmot begins with the death of Yosef the son.⁵ His death is nonetheless enumerated separately⁶ from the other brothers and the rest of the generation, because his status was quite different. He was both a father and a son - *even Yisrael*.

1. See Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 47:6 "Resh Lakish said: The Patriarchs are [God's] Heavenly Chariot. Thus it is written, *And God went up from upon Abraham*; again, *And God went up from upon him* (Bereishit 35:13); further, *And, behold, the Lord stood upon him* (ib. 28, 13).

2. The Chizkuni theorizes that the firstborn was supposed to work in the Temple, and the double portion is the payment they receive for the loss of this privilege. Others explain that the double portion is a reward for turning the parents into parents: Before the birth of the firstborn, the parents were just a couple. Now a fundamental change has transpired, turning these people into parents.

3. We are taught that there would only be 3 patriarchs and 4 matriarchs: Midrash Rabbah - Bereishit 39:11 "He thus informed him that there would be three Patriarchs and four Matriarchs."

4. A meticulous reading of Ya'akov's "blessings" to his sons reveals that only Yosef's "blessing" contains the word blessing.

5. This explanation is found in the book Mima'amakim, based on the lectures of Rav Moshe Shapiro; this may have been the Ramban's intention.

6. *And Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all that generation.* [Shmot 1:6] (



True Greatness

And the king of Egypt said to the midwives, one of whom was named Shifrah and the other Puah. (1:15)

When Pharaoh decreed that all newborn Jewish boys should be drowned, two heroic midwives saved the day. One was named Shifrah and the other Puah. Rashi explains that these two women were none other than Yocheved, Moshe's mother, and Miriam, his sister. Why then were they called Shifrah and Puah? Yocheved was called Shifrah because she was *meshafres es havlad*, she beautified the infants and smoothed their limbs. Miriam was called Puah because she was *poah umedaberes livlad*, she cooed and whispered to the infants.

It seems strange that the special names the Torah gives Yocheved and Miriam memorialize the care they showed to the infants. These women actually saved their lives. If it weren't for them, those infants would have been drowned. Shouldn't they then have been given names that memorialize their heroic rescue of the Jewish children? Wouldn't it have been more appropriate to name them *Hatzalah* and *Teshuah*, for example?

My *Rosh Yeshivah*, Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, always used to say that true greatness is manifested in the little things, the low-profile actions that reveal the depth of character and commitment. It is not enough to perform heroic acts that grab the headlines, so to speak. People of lesser worth can also find it within themselves to rise to the occasion for that one moment of heroism and perform acts of greatness. But it is a superficial greatness, because after the deed is done, they revert to ordinariness. They pat themselves on the back and say, "All right, I've done my duty. I've risked my life and saved the world, and now it's time to go home and get on with my life." A meteoric rise and a descent to earth. True greatness, however, is expressed in small but extraordinary deeds. These two heroic women, Shifrah and Puah, were pulling Jewish children to safety in a time of mortal danger, yet they had the sensitivity and the presence of mind to take the time to beautify their little bodies and to soothe their little souls with coos and whispers. This was true greatness.

The Talmud reports (*Avodah Zarah* 18a) that Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma taught Torah in public despite a Roman decree forbidding anyone to do so under the penalty of death. One day, Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion visited him.

"Don't you know," asked Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion, "that Heaven granted [the Romans] their power? How can you flaunt their decrees?"

"I rely on the mercy of Heaven," Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma replied. "Tell me, will I have a share in the next world?"

"Have you ever done anything outstanding?" asked Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion.

"Yes, I have," said Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma responded. "I once had charity as well as my own money in the same pocket. They got mixed up, and I didn't know which was which. So I gave everything to charity."

"If so," said Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion, "may my own portion be as great as your portion, and may my destiny be as great as yours."

What can we make of this conversation? Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma is risking his life to teach Torah in public. He will probably die a horrible death at the hands of the Romans if he is apprehended. Yet this great act of heroism doesn't seem to guarantee him a share in the next world. What worthy act convinces Rabbi Chanina ben Teradion that Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma has earned a share in the next world? That he gave his own money to charity when it got mixed up with charity money! Amazing!

We see clearly from this Gemara how true greatness is measured. Headline-grabbing acts of heroism are not absolute proof of true greatness. On the other hand, giving away one's own money when it gets mixed up with charity money will never get a headline. In fact, no one will ever know about it. Such an act shows what a person is really made of. Such an act is a sure sign of true greatness.

And she opened [the box] and saw the boy, and behold, he was crying, and she took pity on him and said, "This is a Hebrew boy." (Shemos 2:6)

Pharaoh's daughter Basya went down to the river to bathe, and she caught sight of a box floating among the bulrushes. She sent her attendants to fetch the box, opened it and saw a baby boy crying, and she said, "This is a Hebrew boy."

How did she know this? What made her conclude that the infant Moshe was a Hebrew child? It was not his appearance. It was not the sound of his crying. It was simply the conditions of his discovery. Why was a child adrift in a box on the river? It must be that his

parents were trying to save him from Pharaoh's decree of death to all male Jewish infants.

Basya's logic was excellent, and she guessed right. But it seems to have taken her a while to figure it out. As soon as she saw that the box contained a boy, she should have realized that he was Jewish. But apparently, this is not what happened. According to the Torah, she noticed that "he was crying, and she took pity on him" and only afterward did she say, "This is a Hebrew boy." What took her so long?

Rav Nissan Alpert offered a beautiful solution to this question in the context of his eulogy for his *rebbe*, Rav Moshe Feinstein. Rav Moshe was universally recognized as by far the greatest Torah scholar of his time. His knowledge was vaster than vast, his insight razor sharp and his humility, sensitivity and kindness legendary. One might have thought it would be very difficult for a young scholar to receive a *haskamah*, a letter of approbation, for a new *sefer* from such a towering sage, but just the opposite was true. Rav Moshe gave *haskamos* readily and easily to just about anyone who asked for them. He also gave letters of recommendation and letters of endorsement for all sorts of projects with the same ease. It came to the point that people were no longer impressed by a letter from Rav Moshe, so easy were they to come by. Why did he do this? Why wasn't he more discriminating when it came to writing letters on behalf of people?

Rav Alpert explained that *chessed*, kindness, and *emes*, truth, are not really compatible concepts. Kindness flows from the heart. It is an instinctive emotional response. Truth is established by the brain. It is the product of scrutiny, investigation and logic. In a certain sense, truth is the antagonist of kindness. If we would do a thorough investigation of poor people that ask for charity we would probably reject most of them.

Indeed, when *chessed* and *emes* are mentioned together in the Torah (*Bereishis* 24:49; *Shemos* 34:6; *Yehoshua* 2:14), the word *chessed* always precedes the word *emes*. *Chessed* is quick and instinctive. *Emes* is deliberate and thorough. If *chessed* would wait for *emes*, it would never get off the ground.

A person's first reaction must be kindness. Only afterward should he set off in search for the truth. When a beggar asks for a handout, don't wait until you check out his credentials. Give him something right away. When an institution needs financial assistance, don't call for an audit to determine exactly what the problem is. When a young author comes for an approbation, give it to him! This was Rav Moshe's philosophy in life.

When Basya opened the box and saw the boy, concludes Rav Alpert, her first reaction wasn't to assess the situation, to consider who the child's parents were and why he was adrift on the river, to determine if it would be appropriate to rescue him. Her first reaction was kindness. "He was crying, and she took pity on him." Before she gave any thought to the situation, her kind heart went out to the crying child. Only afterward did she stop to consider the situation, and she came to the correct conclusion that "this is a Hebrew boy."



The Confidence to Grow

Greetings from the holy city of Jerusalem!

This week, we begin the Book of Exodus. One of the primary events of this week's portion is the story of the Burning Bush (Exodus 3:2). It seems odd that God would choose to appear to Moses in this way. Why was a bush necessary at all? Couldn't God have appointed Moses as the redeemer of the Jewish people without a Burning Bush, in the same way that He appeared to the other prophets?

The Slonimer Rebbe helps us resolve this question by distinguishing between the two parts of the Burning Bush: (1) the fire on the outside, and (2) the bush on the inside. According to his interpretation, the fire represents all the impurities of the world - in particular, the impurities of Egypt. Fire symbolizes burning passions that can cause one to yield to temptation, and that have the ability to consume any obstacle that stands in their way. The bush, on the other hand, symbolizes the spiritual strength that each

of us carries deep within. This inner strength is an eternal core that can never be consumed.

Moses saw how steeped the Jewish people were in the impurities of Egyptian society. He thought that the people would never be able to rise above their degraded spiritual state because he assumed they were satisfied with their current level. This could have been a tragic misconception. According to the Admor of Kuvrin, the worst thing we can do is to sell ourselves short. Once we convince ourselves that we will never be able to grow beyond our current level, we actually *prevent* ourselves from achieving our ultimate potential!

This is why God tells Moses, "I have seen (*ra'oh ra'iti*) the affliction of My people in Egypt" (Exodus 3:7). The Midrash (Shmot Raba 3:2) points out that the verb "to see" appears in two forms in this verse. This double language hints to God's penetrating vision - as if God were saying to Moses, "You see with only one pair of eyes, but I see with an additional pair." Before the revelation at the Burning Bush, Moses lacked faith in the Jewish people's ability to overcome the challenges in their path and grow to greater levels. Moses saw only the fires of impurity on the outside.

God, however, saw the people's inner spiritual power - a strength that, like the bush, would never be destroyed. Moses needed to experience the Burning Bush in order to develop confidence in the people's ability to shed their surface impurity and tap into their powerful spiritual core.

May we always be satisfied with our *material* state of being (as it says in Avot 4:1, "Who is wealthy? One who is happy with his portion"), but never be satisfied with our *spiritual* achievements. We should take pleasure in what we have accomplished thus far, but not see our current achievements as indicators of our ultimate potential. And may we have the courage to tap into our deepest inner essence and constantly grow, no matter what fires we may have played with on the outside.