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With Fury Poured Out

When the nascent nation of Israel first came to Egypt, they were treated as royalty. Yosef ruled the country and his brothers lived on the fattest part of the land, in Goshen, separated from the Egyptian masses. Then the Egyptians turned on them, brutally persecuting and enslaving them. What changed?

The Torah seems to say only that "a new king arose over Egypt who did not know of Yosef." He didn't remember Yosef because he didn't want to be indebted to him. And then this new king said, "The Jewish people are bigger than us, more powerful than us. Let's outsmart them, because if they keep on multiplying they will become a fifth column. If there will be a war, they will side with our enemies and destroy us."

Why did Pharaoh turn on the Jews? What caused the Egyptians to suddenly hate us? What hint does the Torah give us to help us understand why this happened?

Assimilation and Anti-Semitism

The Torah's depiction of the rise of the new king who turned against the Jews is preceded by the verse, "The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong – very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. "

The Midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni* 1:7) explains: What does it mean that the land was full of them? After all,

there were many more Egyptians than Jews. Rabbi Yochanan says that they filled the theaters and circuses, and this caused the immediate decree that the Jews must be separated from them.

Citing the verse, "They betrayed God, for they begot alien children" (*Hoshea* 5:7), the *Midrash Tanchuma* (*Shemos* 5) teaches that when Yosef died, the Jews stopped circumcising their children, saying, "We will become like the Egyptians."

The Jews in Egypt were assimilating. They filled up the theaters, they became baseball fans, they started making films in Hollywood. As a result, the Egyptians began to detest them, and sought to remove them from their midst. This was the first demonstration in Jewish history of the spiritual axiom built into the fabric of the universe: assimilation generates antisemitism.

How does this rule operate? The prophet Yechezkel describes the process, and we would do well to pay heed:

As for what you say, "We will be like the nations, like the families of the lands, to worship wood and stone," as I live – the word of the Lord Hashem/Elokim – [I swear that] I will rule over you with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath. I will take you out from the nations and gather you from the lands to which you were scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath... I will make you pass under the rod and bring you into the bond of the covenant... then you will know that I am Hashem. (*Yechezkel* 20:32-34, 37)

You want to assimilate? You think you can become part of the non-Jewish world and no one will bother you? God says, "I will not let that happen. I will reign over you with fury poured out and take you out from among the nations."

The Almighty made a covenant with the Jewish people, and He promises that He will not let us assimilate. He guarantees that we will not get lost no matter how high the intermarriage rate. But what will stop the assimilation? Hashem unleashes the hatred of the non-Jews toward the Jews to keep them from

assimilating. As Rav Chaim Volozhin famously said, “If the Jews don’t make Kiddush, the non-Jews will make Havdalah.” It will be terrible, it will be horrific, but it will save us from oblivion, and we will eventually thank Hashem for it.

Our Generation

Look at our generation – the ever-increasing rate of intermarriage, the millions of Jews who grow up unaffiliated or are raised in other religions, the large-scale abandonment of the path of our Torah. There is no question that Yechezkel is describing our generation. We are living it; we see the confusion engulfing our nation. And we can take some solace in knowing that Hashem will not let us get lost. But can we say that we are looking forward to the anger and the wrath that will pour out to wake us up? Do we want to hear “Death to the Jews” once again on the streets of Europe? To witness pogroms?

Who is responsible? Whom is God warning through his prophet Yechezkel?

He certainly is not talking to Jake and Christine, the nice intermarried couple who have decided to raise their kids with both religions. Christine will remain a Catholic who will take the kids to church now and then, and Jake will take them to temple for the High Holidays. They plan on celebrating both Chanukah and Christmas. During the spring they will have Easter egg hunts on the lawn and also a Passover Seder. If the kids want to remain Jewish, fine. If they will be Catholics, also fine. Hashem is not addressing Jake and Christine since they do not know any better.

He is talking to us, to the committed Jews who know God exists, who know He gave us his holy Torah. He is talking to those of us who understand that we are losing millions of our brothers and sisters, that we are experiencing another spiritual holocaust. We are the only ones on earth who can hear God’s message. There is no one else. We are the ones who are responsible.

The prophet is warning us. We can either make a program, or God forbid there will be a pogrom.

Tear Your Hearts

The prophet says, “Rend your hearts and not your garments, and return to Hashem your God” (Yael 2:13). Tear your hearts and do *teshuvah*, so you won’t have to tear your clothes in mourning. Wake up! Shake yourself out of your apathy. Fix the root of

the problem so that God won’t have to shake us up to get the message.

God is talking to us. We need to take the message to heart. The Talmud teaches, “If one has a headache, it should appear in his eyes as if they placed him in chains [to stand on trial]” (*Shabbos* 32a). Don’t wait for the calamity. If the writing is already on the wall, in the form of mounting antisemitism, you can anticipate the next harsher step if you do not wake up now and do *teshuvah*. It’s going to get worse, because God is not going to give up on us. Look at the consequences and channel that fear into action.

“I will rule over you with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm and with outpoured wrath.” Hashem means business. He promises that He will not let the Jewish people disappear. We will tear our clothes in mourning when His fury pours out and we will cry, “Where were we? We read the studies; we saw what was happening. What did we do about it?” Tear your hearts and wake up. Do not tear your clothes, do not allow the looming catastrophe to happen. It is not enough to feel bad about the masses of Jews assimilating and intermarrying. We cannot remain complacent; we have to act.

We are responsible. We must mobilize and do what we can to reach our brethren and stem the tide of assimilation. Each and every one of us must think about what we can do. Every night before you go to sleep, spend 10 minutes thinking about what can be done. Get involved; join the thousands of people getting practical training tools from Project Inspire and reaching out to their non-religious neighbors, colleagues and family members.

Thank God outreach has become more of a priority and we are making a difference. But it is not enough. We have bought some time, but the storm clouds are growing. There is much to do. God is waiting for us.



Descent and Ascent

To enhance the significance of Israel's descent into Egypt, we can reflect upon this Jewish teaching: "Every descent is for the sake of a greater ascent." The descent acts as a springboard, to

launch upward that which is falling.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, takes this idea a step further. He explains that "the descent is in fact a necessary preparation for the ascent, and its ultimate purpose is the ascent—the descent is nothing other than a part of the ascent itself." Through this spiritual lens, Israel's exile down to Egypt can be viewed as the prelude to the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai.

DOING RIGHT BY DOING WRONG

Consider the life of Moshe. Born during Pharaoh's decree of male infanticide against all male Jewish babies, Moshe's survival was against all odds. These were desperate times indeed. In what might be considered the first recorded act of civil disobedience, the midwives, Shifrah and Puah, whom many of our Sages identify as Moshe's mother, Yocheved, and sister, Miriam, selflessly endangered their lives by boldly assisting Hebrew mothers to safely deliver their babies in defiance of Pharaoh's brutal decree.

As we know from the narrative, when she felt that she no longer could hide her baby, Yocheved negated her maternal instincts. She relinquished her infant son to Divine providence by placing Moshe in the Nile River inside a waterproof basket. As Miriam stood watching from a distance, an astounding occurrence took place. Pharaoh's daughter and her hand-maids appeared. In an unpredictable turn of events, Pharaoh's daughter rescued what was clearly an endangered Hebrew baby. Her own handmaid reprimanded her for blatantly transgressing the law. Pharaoh's daughter listened to her conscience, thereby defying her father.

HEARING THE CRY

She...saw him, the child, and behold, a youth was crying.

A puzzling discrepancy comes to light in the wording of this verse. It first describes the three-month-old Moshe as *ha'yeled*, the child, and then speaks of *naar*, a youth. Every word in the Torah is deliberate, so how are we supposed to understand these words? *Rashi* explains that both terms refer to Moshe, who, although just a baby, had a cry that sounded like that

of an older child. *Baal Haturim*, however, presents a fascinating counter-interpretation. He agrees that *ha'yeled* refers to Moshe, but proposes that the crying *naar* is actually Moshe's older brother, Aharon (Aaron). He derives this from a *gematria*—a Kabbalistic method of revealing numerical correspondence between Hebrew words. The words *naar bocheh*, a youth was crying, are numerically equivalent to "Aharon Hakohen."

This understanding presents a broader perspective through which past and present events connect. Two events, occurring many years apart, are profoundly connected in time. Yosef's brothers threw him into a pit. As Yosef cried out, they chose not to listen, deafening their ears to his despair. This cruelty became the catalyst that led to Yosef's, and later their own, descent into Egypt. By contrast, Aharon's tearful response to his brother's plight set off a parallel reaction from Above. Divine providence interceded, overriding the natural order of things. Now, we can better understand why Pharaoh's daughter appeared at just that time. We can perceive the hidden force that propelled her to boldly defy her father's harsh decree. Without the cries of Aharon and the courage of Yocheved, Miriam, and Pharaoh's daughter, there may not have been a Moshe.

Eighty years later, we have another event that changed the course of history. Moshe, who years before had to flee Egypt after killing an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave, had been shepherding his father-in-law's flocks. He noticed a burning bush that was not being consumed by the fire. He said, "Let me turn away and go over there to behold this remarkable sight." It was only after God saw that Moshe had turned aside to investigate that "He called to him from the midst of the bush."

How often do we fail to see the obvious? We all have blind spots. Moshe could have walked on by, but instead, he changed his course. That singular action impacted history. Likewise, there are pivotal times in our lives when we're given the choice of whether or not to change our direction. At times, a change may appear to be a setback, as when Yosef was sold into slavery or Moshe became a fugitive, fleeing for his life. But, as we can see from these examples, the setback may just be a setup for a greater purpose that takes time to be revealed.

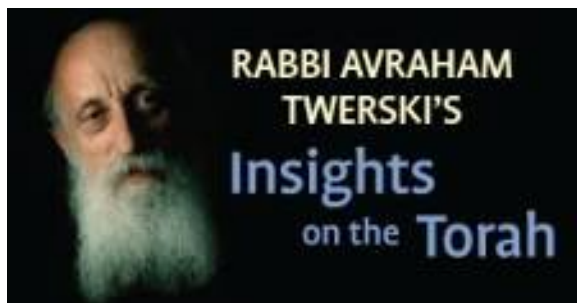
Seeing beyond the status quo and taking action are characteristics that distinguished Moshe. These traits can also distinguish you and me. We easily can miss a lot of what's going on around us. A plethora of distractions compete for our attention. How many

unclaimed blessings have been calling our names? Perhaps we haven't noticed them, even when they are in plain view. We all would like to enjoy immediate results from our efforts, but life is a process that unfolds over time.

Strive to find purpose, even while you wait. Challenge yourself to become more. When things seem down, know that tomorrow they could start to rise. If you should find yourself plagued by crisis or trauma and your faith is put to the test, try to remember: "Every descent is for the sake of a greater ascent."

Making It Relevant

1. Think about positive steps you can take to remain resolute in your faith, even when being put to the test.
2. Recognize the pattern of downs and ups in your life. What have you learned? How have you grown?
3. Don't be afraid to stand up for what you know is right, even if it seems to go against societal "norms."
4. Use "setbacks" as "setups" for personal, spiritual, or societal growth.



How We Relate to God Depends On How We Relate to Others

"A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know of Joseph" (Exodus 1:8).

The Talmud quotes two opinions: It was either a new king or the existing monarch with new policies, who acted as if he "did not know of Joseph" (Sotah 11a). The Midrash follows the second opinion, and states that when the Egyptians turned against the Jews, Pharaoh refused to go along with them and they deposed him for three months, until he yielded to their wishes (Shemos Rabbah 1:9).

Is it not amazing that the king who said to Joseph, "Since God has informed you of all this, there

can be no one so discerning and wise as you" (Genesis 41:39), now says to Moses, "Who is God that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know God" (Exodus 5:2)?

Rabbi Meir Rubman cites Mishnas R' Eliezer: "The reason the Torah is so harsh regarding an ingrate is because denial of gratitude toward another person is tantamount to denial of gratitude toward God. Today one denies gratitude toward a fellow man, and the next day he denies gratitude toward God. All of Egypt knew that Joseph had saved their land, as did Pharaoh. However, Pharaoh chose to deny gratitude toward Joseph, and thereafter denied God, saying, 'Who is God that I should heed His voice?' #133; I do not know God" (Lekach Tov, Shemos p. 5)

How we relate to God depends on how we relate to other people. When the Baal Shem Tov was asked, How can one develop a love for God? How can one love a Being that one cannot see or have any sense experience of Him? He responded, "Love your fellow man. This will lead you to love of God." Indeed, the Talmud says that the way a human being can cleave unto God is to emulate His traits: "Just as He is merciful, you should be merciful" (Shabbos 133a).

Rabbi Yehudah Leib Chasman shares another insight with us. The Midrash says that Pharaoh initially resisted his people's demands that he enslave Jews, because he felt indebted to Joseph and to Jacob's blessing the land. However, when expedience required that he persecute the Jews in order to retain his throne, he became a cruel tyrant, enslaving them and ordering their children to be killed. This shows us that a person is capable of altering his emotions. A person may not say, "That's me. That's just the way I am."

Pharaoh underwent an emotional change because of his desire to keep his position. Just as a person can alter one's emotions negatively, so can one change one's emotions positively. Pharaoh was motivated by expedience. A person can also be motivated by a sincere conviction to do what is right. One need only realize which emotions are proper and have a sincere desire to cultivate them.

People who do not wish to put forth the effort to modify their character traits may say, "I was born that way." Rabbi Shneur Zalman says in Tanya, "It is an inborn capacity that the intellect can be master over the emotions." The ability to change is an inborn trait. In fact, it is

the most significant distinguishing feature between man and other living things. A person who denies his ability to alter his character is lowering himself to a subhuman level. Our dignity should not allow us to do this.



Radical Empathy

Imagine you're teleported to Auschwitz, 1944. You have ten minutes with the prisoners. What would you tell them?

Let the weight of that question settle for a moment.

In this week's Torah portion, we find a profound insight into human connection and the true nature of leadership - one that transforms how we might approach this impossible opportunity.

The Birth of a Leader

In the opening chapters of Exodus, we witness the Jewish people's rapid spiral into unbearable suffering. Pharaoh's initial economic decrees against the Jews escalate into full-scale genocide, targeting every male Jewish infant in an effort to murder the future redeemer of Israel. Against all odds, Moses emerges unscathed, saved by Pharaoh's own daughter and, ironically, raised in the palace of Pharaoh himself.

Though sheltered within the palace walls, his Jewish identity hidden from Pharaoh, Moses ventures out to witness his people's suffering. The Torah's description of this moment contains a profound truth: "When Moses grew up, he went out to his kinsfolk and saw in their burdens (וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלָתָם)." ¹ This peculiar phrasing - not that he saw their burdens, but that he saw *in* their burdens - catches Rashi's attention. The seemingly superfluous letter beit (ב) (meaning "in") teaches us that Moses didn't merely observe their suffering; he immersed himself within it: "He set his eyes and mind to share in their distress." The future leader of Israel did not begin with speeches, but with the profound act of emotional relatedness.

Lightening the Load

We've all gone through major life struggles. Think about the person who helped you most during such a time. Did they bombard you with advice? Stoically assure you everything would be fine?

Years ago, as I grappled with a devastating loss, a Rabbi I barely knew reached out. When he opened up about facing the same struggles, I felt my world expand. I wasn't alone anymore. The uphill climb suddenly felt conquerable because I had an ally who truly understood my pain. He lifted me from despair not through solutions, but through the exalted quality of empathy.

This quality of deep empathy - what our Sages call "*nosei b'ol*" - carrying the burden of one's fellow - transcends mere sympathy. Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe identifies it as the highest form of human achievement, the quality that most closely mirrors Divine attributes. He explains that when we truly enter into another's pain, we shine hope and warmth into their suffering and loneliness. Then, something miraculous happens - we lighten their burden without needing to say a word or offer solutions.

What then are the right words to say to someone in Auschwitz? None. At least not at first. Before we speak, we must first experience and appreciate the suffering of our brethren. Only after establishing this connection of shared pain can we begin to speak of hope and future redemption.

Leading with Empathy

And what happens to someone who masters this exalted quality? When God appears to Moses at the burning bush, the text tells us that "God saw that Moses turned aside to see." The Midrash² reveals a deeper meaning: God saw that Moses had turned aside from his privileged life as a prince to share in the suffering of his people. It was this act of radical empathy - choosing to leave his comfort to truly share his people's pain - that made him worthy of becoming their redeemer.

The next time a spouse, friend, family member, or co-worker shares his or her pain with you, pause. Resist the immediate urge to offer solutions. Instead, practice the holy art of "*nosei b'ol*": step into their world, share their burden, and create a space where healing can begin naturally through the power of genuine empathy.

This is not merely a technique for offering comfort - it is, as Moses' story teaches us, the very foundation

of redemption itself. In a world often marked by disconnection and casual sympathy, the practice of deep empathy becomes nothing less than revolutionary. Through it, we not only heal individual pain but participate in the gradual process of world-repair, hastening the day of ultimate redemption.

Shabbat Shalom! Avraham

Inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Beryl Gershenfeld

1. Exodus 2:11

2. Shemos Rabbah 1:28 - **And Moshe saw in their burdens.** What is “he saw”? He would see their burdens and cry and say: ‘Woe is me over you; would that I could die for you. There is no labor more arduous than labor with mortar.’ He would shoulder [the burdens] and help each and every one of them. Rabbi Elazar son of Rabbi Yosei HaGelili says: He saw a large burden on a small man and a small burden on a large man; the burden of a man on a woman and the burden of a woman on a man; the burden of an elderly man on a lad and the burden of a lad on an elderly man. He would leave his royal guard and would arrange their burdens, feigning as though he was helping Pharaoh. The Holy One blessed be He said: ‘You left your affairs and went to observe the Israelite’s suffering, and you treated them in a brotherly manner; I will leave the upper and lower worlds to speak with you.’ That is what is written: “The Lord saw that he had turned to see” (Exodus 3:4); the Holy One blessed be He saw that he turned from his affairs to see their burdens; therefore, “God called to him from the midst of the bush”