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הדלקת נרות	4:14
הנץ	7:16
סוף זמן קריאת שמע	9:36
שקיעה	4:33
שבת Ends	5:19

זמנים for ZIP code 11559

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**He was Born a Tzadik**

When one observes the life of a great person and compares his meager accomplishments to theirs, he may comfortably rationalize that Tzadikim exit the womb as perfected, righteous people, and are thereby destined for success on both an individual, as well as a communal level.

When explaining the Talmudic principle, "hakol bidai shamayim chutz miyiras shamayim", (everything is in the hands of Hashem EXCEPT for fear of Hashem), Rambam writes that each and every individual is capable of being as righteous as Moshe, or evil as Yeravam Ben Nevat (the wicked king who split the Jewish Nation, and led Malchus Yisroel to worship Avodah Zarah). Furthermore, no one's individual spiritual level is predestined from birth. (Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Teshuva, 5-2)

If one examines the events recorded at the outset of Shemos, it seems that Moshe personally elevated himself to a lofty spiritual level and was consequently deserving of being the leader of Israel. Although Moshe's sister, Miriam, prophesized that her mother would give birth to the savior, had he not perfected himself, the exodus would not have occurred with Moshe as Hashem's emissary.

*continued on page 2*

**Rabbi Avrum  
Haar  
Rebbe**

**The Bricks and the Cement**

In Parshas Shemos, we are told of G-d's famous revelation to Moshe at the burning bush, during which He commands Moshe to return to Egypt and demand that the Jewish people be released. Moshe is initially reluctant to accept this mission, but ultimately is convinced that he must go to Egypt and lead Bnei Yisrael to freedom. Oddly enough, we read that before he returns to Egypt, he first approaches his father-in-law, Yisro, to request his permission to leave (4:18). The obvious question arises, why would Moshe find it necessary to request Yisro's permission to carry out this mission? G-d commanded him to go to Egypt; did it really matter whether or not he received the authorization of his father-in-law, a former pagan priest?

This incident exemplifies the famous Rabbinic dictum, "Derech Eretz Kadma Le'Torah" (Respectful, dignified conduct is a prerequisite for Torah observance). When Moshe was a fugitive, fleeing from the death penalty to which Pharaoh had sentenced him, Yisro warmly invited him into his home and gave him both a wife and an occupation. It was only proper for Moshe to approach his father-in-law and ask for permission to return to Egypt; this gesture was dictated by the basic rules of Derech Eretz (respect and good manners).

*continued on page 3*

**Aaron  
Kattan  
Senior**

דברי תורה מתלמידי מתיבתא רמב"ם

## He was Born a Tzadik *continued*

The Torah states that Moshe “grew up” (“Vayigdal ha’ish) and went out to his brethren (2-11). This is seemingly superfluous, as the previous pasuk states that he grew up (“Vayigdal hayeled”). The Ramban comments that the first reference is to physical growth, while the second is to maturity. He was informed that he was a Jew, and he made the conscious decision to abandon the comforts of the royal palace due to concern for his brethren. He then smote an Egyptian who was oppressing a Jew, unable to bear the sight of his people enslaved.

After narrowly escaping execution in Egypt, the fugitive Moshe finds himself at a well in Midian where he rescues Yisro’s daughters from the shepherds who were harassing them. Not only does he chase them away, he gives the ladies’ animals to drink, and then painstakingly draws more water from the well and re-fills the troughs until the animals are satiated (2-19).

Moshe’s kindness ingratiates him to Yisro, and Yisro gives Moshe his daughter’s hand in marriage. While working as a shepherd for his father-in-law, he finds himself “achar hamidbar”, far from civilization (3-1). He purposefully did this to prevent his sheep from grazing on other’s property (Rashi), a seemingly accepted, though prohibited practice!

While in the desert Moshe turns to observe a burning bush that was not consumed. The Torah clearly states that, “Hashem saw that Moshe turned to observe”, and called out to Moshe (3-4). The Seforno comments that Moshe made the initial move in desiring to understand the event from a sage’s intellectual perspective, thereby warranting a response from Hashem.

Perhaps these events demonstrate the development of a leader. One who acts upon an injustice in a genuinely modest and selfless manner considers the needs of the community, and exhibits true kindness by helping others is a candidate. An individual who maintains an ethical standard based on truth rather than what is “accepted” by society (“everybody does it” so it is OK!!), and one who operates on pure wisdom and prudence will have the potential to be a righteous leader.

Moshe chose wisely when confronted with the opportunities that led to the Geulah, and had he not done so, the event would have transpired differently or not at all. Let us hope that we too choose wisely upon being confronted with difficult decisions, using our free will that Hashem has provided us with as intelligently and righteously as possible.

## Questioning Hashem?

In Parshas Shemos, Hashem directs Moshe to approach Bnei Yisrael and tell them he was sent by Hashem to redeem them. When Moshe hears this, he becomes uncomfortable with these directions. He argues that Bnei Yisrael would ask him for G-d’s explicit name and Moshe would not know what to answer.

Why was Moshe afraid that he would be unable to answer Bnei Yisrael? Hashem told Moshe to introduce himself by saying that the he had been sent by “Elokei” (the G-d of) Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. The answer is, Bnei Yisrael indeed knew the name. But the terminology Hashem originally used was “Elokei,” the name connoting Hashem’s attribute of stern judgment. How could Moshe use the name of severity during this time of terrible slavery? Such usage would be akin to pouring salt into fresh wounds! Therefore, Hashem told Moshe to use the divine name “Ekyeh asher Ekyeh” (I shall be what I shall be). Rashi explains this name was used to imply that Hashem was with Bnei Yisrael in their time of pain.

This explanation still begs a question: how could Moshe take issue with Hashem over which name to reveal? Hashem is the master of the world. Did Moshe truly believe that Hashem had not already considered and rejected his logic?

**Shlomo  
Laufer**  
*Sophomore*

*continued on page 4*

## **The Bricks and the Cement** *continued*

If G-d issued a command, it went without saying that its fulfillment would not entail a breach of Derech Eretz; it was obvious to Moshe that the command to return to Egypt meant that he should return only after receiving his father-in-law's permission.

One Rabbi drew a parallel between the Torah's commandments and bricks. No matter how many bricks one has, and regardless of their size, one cannot possibly construct a building without cement. Cement allows one to arrange the bricks into the desired form and structure; it is what enables the bricks to combine together and create a magnificent edifice. Similarly, the Mitzvos are the "bricks" with which we are to build a Torah lifestyle. Living a Torah life means observing all the Torah's laws, such as Shabbos, Kashrus and so on. But the Mitzvos cannot create this "building" without Derech Eretz, the "cement" that lends Torah life its form and structure. If a person observes the Torah's laws but speaks impolitely and acts in an undignified manner, he cannot possibly create a proper Torah lifestyle; the "bricks" will remain individual acts that do not combine to form an overall structure.

As much as we should strive for excellence in our observance of all the Torah's commandments, we must be equally concerned to refine our character traits and conduct ourselves in a polite, respectful, good-natured manner, which together with our Mitzva observance, will result in a beautiful Torah life that will bring pride and honor to our community and the entire Jewish people.

## **A Father's Love, for Better or for Worse**

Parshas Shemos contains the first revelation of G-d by the name "I Will Be Who I Will Be." The Midrash comments that G-d forcefully redeemed all the Jewish people from Egypt, even those individuals who were wicked. However, those who did not wish to leave Egypt died during the three days of darkness.

G-d redeemed all willing Jews from Egypt because, as stated in this week's portion of Shemos, they are "His firstborn son." He tells Pharaoh to, "Send out My son so that he may serve Me."

The redemption of the Jews from Egypt thus came about because all the Jews in Egypt, even the lowliest, were considered to be G-d's children. The connection between a father and child is so primal that it cannot deteriorate or change. G-d's relationship with every Jew is so powerful that throughout the Talmud the Rabbis say, "Whatever the case (whether you are good, evil, or somewhere in between), you are called My children, [therefore,] exchanging them for another nation is impossible." If the Talmudic statement is true though, why weren't all the Jews redeemed from Egypt? Furthermore, the Zohar states that during the exile in Egypt there were different categories of evil-doers among the Jews, up to and including people worshipping idols, so much so that there were individuals who left Egypt with their idols in hand. Nevertheless, nearly all the Jews managed to take part in the Exodus. Why then were those who did not want to leave Egypt excluded from the redemption? How were they different from the rest?

According to Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi, the very day of Yom Kippur brings atonement for nearly all sins, even if the sinner himself does not repent. However, he also says that if a person transgresses the prohibitions of Yom Kippur itself, such as eating and drinking on that day, then Yom Kippur will not atone for these sins. Since, according to Raabi Yehudah HaNasi, Yom Kippur atones even for the harshest of sins, why does it not ameliorate the sins of Yom Kippur itself? The Rogatchover Gaon answers that since these sins pertain to Yom Kippur itself, Yom Kippur serves as a vehicle for them, the sins came about through the very day of Yom Kippur. He continues to say that the cause of a sin cannot simultaneously act as its atonement, borrowing the famous Talmudic dictum "a prosecutor cannot become a defense attorney."

Yom Kippur reveals the essential bond between every Jew and G-d, a bond that transcends iniquity. However, sins relating to Yom Kippur itself block the revelation of this bond with G-d. It is therefore impossible for the bond to serve as a basis of a person's forgiveness for sins committed on Yom Kippur, since these very sins obscure this bond. The same is true regarding the events of Parshas Shemos. The arousal from above that brought about the redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt was predicated upon the revelation of G-d's bond as Father of His children.

**Aryeh  
Shemelzman**  
*Sophomore*

*continued on page 4*

## A Father's Love, for Better or for Worse *continued*

Since this connection is not subject to change, it resulted in freeing all the Jews from Egyptian slavery, even those who were wicked, for "Whatever the case, you are called (My) children."

But those Jews who refused to leave Egypt, chose to remain "slaves to slaves" - conducting themselves in complete opposition to the relationship implied by the phrase "My firstborn son." They placed themselves in a different category. By token of their refusal to leave, they opposed the very essence of the bond between G-d and all Jews. It was impossible for this revelation to serve as the grounds for their redemption because "a prosecutor cannot become a defense attorney."

Nonetheless, this was only so regarding the redemption from Egypt. Concerning the future Redemption, the Torah assures us that all Jews, without exception, will be redeemed. May we soon merit to partake in the final redemption with Mashiach Tzidkeinu speedily in our days.

## Questioning Hashem? *continued*

The Torah presents a somewhat analogous case in Sefer Bereishis. In Parshas Vayera, Hashem tells Avraham that He is going to destroy Sedom. Avraham, in turn, argues with Hashem in an attempt to save the Sodomites from obliteration. Avraham never thought twice when faced with his Asara Nisyonos, ten incredible tests, culminating in Akeidas Yitzchak. What had changed? Was Avraham lacking in his faith?

In truth, Hashem is beyond the comprehension of any of his creatures, and we do not have the ability or authority to question Him, even if we are perfected and saintly. Whenever the Torah uses a language of Hashem going down or descending, it is metaphorically saying that Hashem is descending to the realm of man. When Hashem does this so called "descending," great tzadikim are permitted to question Him. By Avraham the pasuk says, "I will go down" to examine the people of Sedom, thus allowing Avraham to ask him to save Sedom. By Moshe the pasuk said, "I will descend to save Egypt" allowing Moshe to question the name.

This idea can help us understand the Mitzvah of learning Torah. The main idea of learning Torah is to ask questions about the Torah. How could we ask questions about Torah, something which is the wisdom of G-d?

The pasuk in Yisro says that "Hashem descended to Har Sinai" before he gave the Torah to Bnei Yisrael. This shows that Hashem gave the Torah to the realm of man. Therefore, man has the ability and the obligation to question and understand the Torah in order to get the Halacha.

Mazel Tov to

Daniel Fruchter (Class of 2000) on the birth of a son

Rabbi and Mrs. Jeff Thurm (Class of 2004) on the birth of a son

If you would like to dedicate an edition of Hamasmid, please email [hamasmideditor@gmail.com](mailto:hamasmideditor@gmail.com) or call the Mesivta at 516-371-5824, Ext. 116  
The Hamasmid Staff would like to thank Naomi and Shirley for graciously reviewing our articles this week.