

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שמות

ויהי כל נפש יצאי ירך יעקב שבעים נפש ויוסף היה במצרים
“And all the persons who emerged from Yaakov's loins were seventy souls and Yosef was in Egypt” (1:5)

Why does the Torah need to add that Yosef was in Mitzrayim? Rashi explains that the Torah is teaching that Yosef remained righteous throughout his life. Whether as a shepherd at home or as a viceroy in Egypt, Yosef was always a tzadik. R' Moshe Feinstein asks: Why is it necessary to mention at this point, at the beginning of Sefer Shemos, that Yosef was a tzadik? He answers that the story of the exile begins here. Even though Hashem had told Avraham Avinu that his descendants would be enslaved, He assured him that the fourth generation would return to Eretz Yisrael. What was the key that allowed the fourth generation to return? The first one to go into exile was Yosef. He set an example for his family to follow by not mixing with the Egyptians and remaining righteous even in a foreign country. Not only Yosef paved the way and taught about the proper way to act in exile, but his entire generation, all of his brothers, set an example for generations to come. Because they began the exile acting in the correct manner, they merited that their children would one day be redeemed from Egypt. Therefore, in the very beginning of this narrative, the Torah reminds us that Yosef was a tzadik even in Egypt and that is how one should conduct himself in exile. This is why the parsha begins by stating that "these are the names of the sons of Yaakov who are coming to Egypt." It is written in present tense, as if they were coming now, because even when it had been many years since they had first arrived, they did not feel comfortable in their own land and felt just like strangers who only come now for the first time. Throughout the many years of their stay in Egypt, they only lived in a temporary fashion, constantly aware of the fact that they were not truly at home. This example that they set should still stand for us today. We should be cognizant of our exile and that we are not at home. Only with that awareness will we be able to merit the coming of Moshiach and the ultimate redemption.

ויקרא מלך מצרים למילדת ויאמר להן מדוע עשיתן הדבר הזה ותחיינ את הילדים
“The king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them: Why have you done this thing, that you have caused the boys to live” (1:18)

What was the greatness of the midwives? The Chofetz Chaim writes that when Pharaoh commanded them to kill the baby boys, they could have resigned in protest. In this way, they would have not done anything wrong. Nobody could have any complaints about them. However, they realized that if they would quit, Pharaoh would hire other midwives in their places who would do the job for him. They understood that they had to put themselves at risk by taking the job and then not doing it. Not being the one to carry out the evil plan was not enough, they needed to subvert the plan themselves. In fact, Rashi cites the Gemara in Sotah 11b on the expression that they "caused the boys to live" that they fed the babies and gave them to drink. Pharaoh was angry at them because not only did they refrain from killing the babies, but they helped them and made sure that they

survived. They recognized what needed to be done and they acted accordingly.

A man once sought R' Yisrael Salanter's advice about whether to accept a certain rabbinical position. When he was advised to take the job, he protested that he was afraid that he would make mistakes in halacha and give people wrong answers to their questions. R' Yisrael Salanter told him that if he did not take the position, then someone less worthy would take it and nothing would be accomplished. It would be better for a worthy person who has these concerns to take the job and with the help of Hashem he would succeed. Often people will turn down responsibility because they feel unworthy. However, although such an attitude appears righteous on the surface, it really is incorrect. What is more important is the honor of Hashem. If a person recognizes that, despite his own perceived shortcomings, he is the best person for the job, he should take it with the intention of creating the maximum amount of glory for Hashem as possible. Modesty is important, but up to a point. Just as the midwives could have walked away but instead chose to take the responsibility to undermine Pharaoh, we should not be afraid to take charge and do things that will increase the service of Hashem and the glory of Hashem around us.

ויהי כי יראו המילדת את האלקים ויעש להם בתים

“And it was because the midwives feared Hashem that He made them houses” (1:21)

Rashi explains that Hashem blessed the midwives that their descendants became the houses of Kohanim and Leviyim. The Kotzker Rebbe explains that the reward that was given to them was that they should build houses which emanated Yiras Hashem, just as they had displayed similar awe of Hashem in their actions. The Kohanim were people who were the paradigm of Yiras Hashem, as Malachi (2:5) says about Kohanim, "My covenant was with him, life and peace; I gave these to him for the sake of the fear with which he feared Me, for he was is awe of My Name." Yiras Hashem is a house because it creates a protective wall around a person. The Gemara in Shabbos 31b says that a person who has Torah but no fear of Heaven is compared to someone who has the keys to the inner room of a storeroom but does not have the key to the outer door. A person needs the fear of Heaven to protect the Torah that he has learned and the merit of the mitzvos that he has performed. The Gemara in Sotah 11b says that the midwives were never even tempted to go along with Pharaoh's plan. R' Tzadok HaKohen explains that since they had fear of Hashem, it served as a wall of protection around them to the point that they were never tempted to do anything evil. This is the greatness of this middah.

ומשה היה רעה את צאן יתרו חתנו כהן מדין וינהג את הצאן אחר המדבר ויבא אל הר האלקים חרבה

“Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yisro, his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; he guided the sheep far into the wilderness and he arrived at the Mountain of Hashem, toward Chorev” (3:1)

Rashi says that Moshe took the sheep far into the wilderness so that they would not eat grass that belonged to anyone else. Why would this be an introduction to the first time that Moshe experienced Divine revelation? Rabbi Friedman suggests that Torah can only come to a person if he is a person of honesty. Without honesty, a person cannot grow in

Torah. It will never take root in him. Hashem appeared to Moshe on the heels of an extreme act of honesty in order to illustrate this point. In such a person, Torah can grow and flourish. Such a person is worthy of being the liaison between Hashem and His people. Often, we lose sight of the most basic good character traits and focus on behaviors that make us appear more religious than our neighbor. We should recognize that it was honesty that made Moshe special and made him worthy of hearing the voice of Hashem.

**ויאמר אל תקרב הלם של נעליך מעל רגליך כי המקום אשר אתה עומד עליו
אדמת קדש הוא**

“He said: Do not come closer to here, remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground” (3:5)

Why was the purpose of Moshe taking off his shoes? The shoes are a separation between the person and the ground. By telling Moshe to remove them, Hashem indicated that only man-made separations block us from having a connection with Hashem. In truth, every place is a holy location which has the presence of Hashem. "His glory fills the entire world." The only thing that distances us and prevents us from sensing Hashem's presence everywhere is our sins. Once we remove those barriers, Hashem is with us wherever we may be. We can accomplish anything at any time in any place. All we have to do is remove the separations that we have placed between Hashem and ourselves.

Kesharim Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur

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