

In this week's *Parashah*, we read that Yaakov and his family descended to Egypt, they became slaves, and Hashem commanded Moshe to go to Pharaoh and obtain their freedom. Almost in passing, we learn that Moshe rescued Yitro's daughters from oppressors at a well, Yitro took Moshe into his home, and Moshe married one of Yitro's daughters.

In fact, R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (1923-1986; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva) notes, our Sages derive an important lesson about performing *Chessed* / kindness from Moshe's encounter with Yitro. Approximately four centuries after that event, when King Shaul was about to go to war against Amalek, he sent a message to Yitro's descendants (*Shmuel I* 15:6), "Go, withdraw, descend from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them--for you performed kindness with all of *Bnei Yisrael* when they went up from Egypt." Say our Sages: Yitro performed kindness for Moshe only in the hope that Moshe would marry one of his daughters (see *Rashi* to *Shmot* 2:20). Nevertheless, Yitro's act was considered *Chessed*--not a minor *Chessed*, but one in whose merit King Shaul said 400 years later, "You performed kindness with all of *Bnei Yisrael*."

Indeed, so far does *Chessed* go that one must feel indebted even to inanimate objects from which he benefits. Thus, says the *Gemara* (*Bava Kamma* 92b), "Do not throw a clump of earth into a well from which you drank." (*Siftei Chaim: Mo'adim* Vol. III, p.151).

## Shabbat

The *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 12a) teaches that a person should not carry items out of doors shortly before *Shabbat*, lest he forget and have them in his pockets on *Shabbat* (where there is no *Eruv*, or if the items are *Muktzeh*). However, says the *Gemara*, a person is permitted to wear *Tefilin* outdoors until a moment before *Shabbat*. Since a person wearing *Tefilin* is obligated to touch them repeatedly, he won't forget that he is wearing them. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: The purpose of *Tefilin* is to acquire holiness that is expressed outwardly, *i.e.*, through the physical act of donning *Tefilin*. Ultimately, outward holiness leads a person to inner holiness--represented by *Shabbat*, which, to a large extent, is observed passively (by refraining from work) and through thoughts and feelings.

There are those who claim that they don't need to fulfill active *Mitzvot* because they feel inner holiness. Such people may even claim that the minutiae of *Mitzvot* distract them from their inner holiness. Those are the people the *Gemara* (*Rosh Hashanah* 17a) refers to, writes R' Kook, when it says that a "head that never wore *Tefilin*" will descend to *Gehinnom* and never emerge. [Perhaps R' Kook understands the *Gemara* like R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*), who writes in *Sha'ar Ha'gemul* that a "head that never wore *Tefilin*" refers to a person who writes-off any *Mitzvah*; not wearing *Tefilin* is just one example.]

In reality, R' Kook continues, the secrets hidden deep within each *Mitzvah* are what imbue us with inner holiness. Thus, *Tefilin* may be worn up to the last minute before *Shabbat*, concludes R' Kook, as there is no worry that one's involvement in an active *Mitzvah*, an expression of outward holiness, will interfere with experiencing inner holiness, represented by *Shabbat*.  
(*Ein Ayah*)

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(*Zlata Chaya bas Avraham Zev a"h* - 23 Tevet)

**“Hashem said to him, ‘What is that in your hand?’ and he said, ‘A Mateh / staff.’” (4:2)**

R’ Michel Twerski *shlita* (rabbi and *Chassidic Rebbe* in Milwaukee, Wisconsin) interprets allegorically: *Hashem* asked Moshe, “What is in your hand,” *i.e.*, what do you think is really in your control?

Moshe answered: “Only the *Mateh*.” The word “*Mateh*” shares a root with the verb, “to turn.” There is so much that is not in man’s control. What is in his control is the way he “turns,” *i.e.*, his reactions to the events he experiences.

(*Yir’am Ha’yam: Bereishit* p.263)

**“So they [Moshe and Aharon] said, ‘The Elokim of the Ivrim / Hebrews happened upon us . . .’” (5:3)**

Why did Moshe Rabbeinu refer to *Bnei Yisrael* as “*Ivrim*” when he spoke to Pharaoh for the first time? *Midrash Rabbah* answers: Because they crossed (“*Avru*”) the *Yam Suf*. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Eliyahu E. Dessler *shlita* (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak; not to be confused with his cousin and namesake, the *Michtav M’Eliyahu*) asks the obvious question: But they had not yet crossed the *Yam Suf*! Also, R’ Dessler asks: Our Sages teach that a person’s or thing’s name is meant to describe his/her/its essence. How is crossing the *Yam Suf* the essence of the Jewish People? If not for this *Midrash*, we would have thought that crossing the *Yam Suf* was an incidental event in our history; we were cornered at the Red Sea, so *Hashem* had to rescue us!

R’ Dessler answers: The first person to bear the title “*Ivri*” was our Patriarch Avraham (*Bereishit* 14:13). *Midrashim* offer several reasons for this title, including that, figuratively, the whole world stood on one side (“*Ever*”), and Avraham stood on the other side (“*Ever*”). Certainly, writes R’ Dessler, Avraham appeared to the untrained eye to be walking on the same earth as everyone else. The reality, however, is that Avraham walked in a different world--a world where, for instance, a person can be thrown into a burning furnace and emerge unscathed, as Avraham was in his youth. Simply put, though Avraham walked on this earth, he did not live under the laws of nature that govern affairs in this world.

As a nation, Avraham’s descendants also exist outside of the laws of nature, R’ Dessler continues. One of the outstanding proofs of this is the splitting of the *Yam Suf*, allowing *Bnei Yisrael* to walk through the sea on dry land as the Egyptians drowned. (Iy”H, we will elaborate upon this point when we reach *Parashat Beshalach*.) This was Moshe Rabbeinu’s message to Pharaoh at their first meeting: You are not picking a fight with ordinary people, but rather with people who live on a different plane than you do, people who are *Ivrim*, who will cross the *Yam Suf*. Although *Bnei Yisrael* had not yet crossed the sea, the characteristic that made that crossing possible--being aloof from the laws of nature--was inborn, inherited from our Patriarch Avraham.

(*Sha’arei Ha’zmanim: Yom Kippur* p.312)

**“They embittered their lives with hard work, with mortar and with bricks, and with every labor of the field.” (1:14)**

R’ Shlomo Zarka *z”l* (Algeria; died 1876) and R’ Yehuda Chermon *z”l* (Algeria; 1812-1911) ask: Why does the verse begin with construction work (“with mortar and with bricks”) and then switch to farm work (“every labor of the field”)?

They explain: As we read later in the *Parashah, Bnei Yisrael* had a quota of bricks they had to produce each day. If they finished early, they could go home for the day. However, on their way home, Egyptians would grab them and force them to do farm work and perform other tasks, *i.e.*, “every labor of the field.”

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Rinah V’yeshuah* p.102)

**“The woman conceived and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was good and she hid him for three months.” (2:2)**

The *Gemara* (*Sotah* 12a) teaches: What does it mean that Yocheved saw that her baby --later named, Moshe--was “good”? It means the entire house filled with light. The *Gemara* states further: She saw that the *Shechinah* was with him. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

*Midrashim* state that Haman was pleased when his lot fell on the month of *Adar*, for he knew that Moshe died in *Adar*. However, he did not know that Moshe also was born in *Adar*. Why, asks, R’ Eliezer Dan Ralbag *z”l* (1832-1895; Yerushalayim), did Haman not know that Moshe was born in *Adar*? (It stands to reason that the same way that he had learned one fact about Moshe, he could have learned the second fact.)

R’ Ralbag explains: Why did the house fill up with light when Moshe was born? And, what is the significance of the three months for which Yocheved hid Moshe? The answer is that Moshe was born three months prematurely. The *Gemara* (*Niddah* 30b) states that as long as a baby is in the womb, a “candle” burns above his head. That “candle” is the light of the *Shechinah* that accompanies the baby as he learns Torah in the womb. When Moshe was born prematurely, his *Neshamah* complained to *Hashem*: “Why should I miss out on three more months of the *Shechinah*’s company?” Therefore, the *Shechinah* remained with him, and “the entire house filled with light.” This continued for three months, until the day Moshe was due to have been born. (What was that date? Not coincidentally, it was 7 *Sivan*, the date on which the Torah later would be given.)

This explains Haman’s mistake. Haman knew that Moshe was born on 7 *Adar*. However, Haman thought that the seventh of *Sivan*, the day when the light of the *Shechinah* departed from Moshe, counted as his birth date, just like for any other baby that is born. We know otherwise--*i.e.*, that Moshe’s birthday is 7 *Adar*--because Moshe told us so (see *Devarim* 31:2 and *Rashi z”l* there).

(*Damesek Eliezer*)