

At the beginning of this week's *Parashah*, *Bnei Yisrael* are enslaved in Egypt. Later, we are introduced to Moshe, who is commanded by *Hashem* to confront Pharaoh and take *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt. But Moshe argues with *Hashem*--for a whole week, our Sages say--claiming that he is not the right man for the job. Instead, Moshe says, *Hashem* should send Aharon, who is already an experienced leader! (See *Rashi z"l* to *Shmot* 4:13)

Moshe's seeming obstinance is very difficult to understand, writes R' Zeidel Epstein z"l (1908-2007; *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yaakov Yosef (RJJ) and Yeshiva Torah Ore). There is no greater *Mitzvah* than *Pidyon Shevuyim*/ redeeming captives, and in Egypt there was not one captive, but millions! Moreover, our Sages say that *Pharaoh* was murdering 150 Jewish children every day and bathing in their blood! How could Moshe not hurry to perform G-d's command?

R' Epstein explains: The *Gemara* (*Berachot* 10b) teaches that if someone relies on his own merit, the credit [for his success] will be attributed to the merit of others. Conversely, if someone prays in the merit of others, the credit will be attributed to his own merit. For example, Moshe prayed after the sin of the Golden Calf (32:13), "Remember for the sake of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yisrael..." In the end, however, Moshe gets the credit, as we read (*Tehilim* 106:23), "[*Hashem*] said He would destroy them--had not Moshe, His chosen one, stood in the breach..." [The *Gemara* cites verses to prove the converse as well.] - **Continued in box inside -**

Shabbat

R' Avraham Abba Leifer z"l (1918-1990; *Pittsburgher Rebbe* in Pittsburgh, PA and Ashdod, Israel) lists the following "good practices" relating to *Shabbat*.

1. One should be accustomed to remember *Shabbat* every day. According to *Midrash Mechilta*, this is the meaning of the verse (*Shmot* 20:8), "Remember the *Shabbat* day to sanctify it"--i.e., there is a positive commandment to remember *Shabbat* daily.
2. Not only must one remember the day itself, one must remember its sanctity, as the verse says, "To sanctify it." One does this by speaking and learning about the holiness and greatness of *Shabbat* daily.
3. A thoughtful person will pray several times every day that he merit to reach the next *Shabbat* and to attach himself to it and be elevated by its sanctity. Likewise, he should pray that the influence of the holiness of *Shabbat* remain with him always.
4. One should also take care to purify and sanctify himself from one *Shabbat* to the next, and to try during the week to repair his *Middot* / character traits and any flaws in his soul, especially as they relate to observance of the holy *Shabbat*.
5. On *Shabbat*, one should view all of his work as if it is already completed. In order to accomplish this, one must take time every day to reflect on *Bitachon* / trust in *Hashem*, and one must cast his burden on *Hashem* (paraphrasing *Tehilim* 55:23) so that he will have no worries on *Shabbat*.
6. Likewise, a person should set aside some time every day when all he speaks about is *Torah* and Divine service. Refraining from mundane speech for some time each day will make it easier for a person to observe the directive that one's conversation be different on *Shabbat* from his typical weekday speech.

- **Continued in box inside -**

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"You shall say to Pharaoh, 'So said Hashem, My firstborn son is Yisrael.'" (4:22)

In what sense are the Jewish People *Hashem's* "firstborn"?

R' Meir Simcha Hakohen z"l (1843-1926; rabbi of Dvinsk, Latvia) explains: Having a firstborn is what makes one a father. So, too, the Jewish People make *Hashem* the "Father" of the world, so-to-speak, by being the ones who recognize His Providence and His Oneness.

(*Meshech Chochmah*)

R' Mordechai Ilan z"l (1915-1981; *Av Bet Din* / Chief Justice of the Tel Aviv Rabbinical Court) notes that the above explanation is supported by verses in *Tehilim* (89:27-28), "He will call to Me, 'You are my Father . . .' I, too, will make him a firstborn . . ."

R' Ilan continues: One can explain, alternatively, that just as a firstborn is alone before he has siblings--he does not need siblings for his existence, and he is not influenced by siblings--so the nature of the Jewish People is to be alone, as we read (*Bemidbar* 23:9), "Behold! it is a nation that will dwell in solitude."

(*Mikdash Mordechai*)

- Continued from front page -

On the verse (3:10), "And now, go and I shall dispatch you to Pharaoh and you shall take My people *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt," R' Chaim ben Attar z"l (1696-1743; Morocco, Italy and *Eretz Yisrael*) writes that *Hashem* was seeking Moshe's agreement. Moshe understood, however, writes R' Epstein, that agreeing that he had sufficient merit to be the redeemer would make him unworthy of the job, as the *Gemara* cited above teaches. Only if Moshe was absolutely sure that he was the wrong person for the task would he be the right person. When the Torah tells us (*Bemidbar* 12:3), "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth," the Torah is not telling us about an incidental quality that Moshe had. Rather, it was that very quality that made him fit for the greatness that he achieved.

R' Epstein continues: When *Hashem* commanded Moshe to take *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt, *Hashem* was testing Moshe. R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (*Ramban*; 1194-1270; Spain and *Eretz Yisrael*) explains that the purpose of a *Nisayon* / Divine test is to bring out a person's latent potential. It follows that Moshe was not doing something wrong by resisting *Hashem's* command. Rather, the very purpose of that command was to bring out Moshe's latent humility, to allow Moshe to feel and express his own inadequacy to be the redeemer--whether in deference to his older brother (Aharon), because he had a speech impediment, or for other reasons--for only then would he be qualified to go to Pharaoh and take *Bnei Yisrael* out of Egypt.

(*He'arot: Ma'amar 5*)

"But as much as they would afflict it, so it would increase and so it would spread out . . ." (1:12)

R' Moshe Teitelbaum z"l (1759-1841; rabbi and *Chassidic Rebbe* in Újhely, Hungary) writes: We read (*Yeshayah* 57:15), "I am with the despondent and lowly of spirit," meaning that the *Shechinah* / Divine Presence is with one who is subdued (see *Rashi* z"l there). That the *Shechinah* is with the downtrodden explains why the more *Bnei Yisrael* were oppressed, the more they multiplied. A source that the presence of the *Shechinah* leads to blessings such as an unnatural birthrate is the fact that the family of Oved Edom Ha'giti multiplied unnaturally when the *Aron Hakodesh* / Holy Ark was stored in their house (see *Shmuel II* 6:11). In both cases, our Sages say, mothers gave birth to six children at a time.

(*Yismach Moshe*)



"But the midwives feared Elokim and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live." (1:17)

R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l (*Mashgiach Ruchani* of the Mir Yeshiva; died 1936) asks: Why does the Torah need to inform us that the midwives feared G-d? Is it not praise enough to say that they refused to obey Pharaoh's evil order?

R' Levovitz explains: That the midwives feared G-d is not the reason why they did not obey Pharaoh. Rather, the Torah is telling us how the midwives found the courage to disobey the king. The midwives were subjected to a very difficult test, and they prevailed by strengthening their own *Yir'at Elokim* / fear of G-d, reflecting on G-d's awesome power and weighing the gain from this sin--saving their own lives--against the Divine punishment they would face.

This type of reflection is the essence of the *Mitzvah* of *Yir'ah*, R' Levovitz writes. At first glance, it is difficult to understand how this *Mitzvah* is to be performed; after all, *Yir'ah* is an emotion, not an action. Similarly, how can there be a *Mitzvah* to love *Hashem*? The answer is that the *Mitzvah* is not to feel these emotions, but rather to perform actions that will help a person acquire these emotions.

(*Da'at Torah*)

- Continued from back page -

R' Leifer concludes: One should set aside a little bit of time each day as a taste of *Shabbat*. In this way, he will fulfill the commandments to "Remember the *Shabbat* day to sanctify it" and (*Devarim* 5:12), "Safeguard the *Shabbat* day to sanctify it," even on weekdays.

(*Emunat Abraham Al Zemirot Shabbat Kodesh* p.17)