



Parsha Pearls

A summary of this week's Torah portion

Aliyah #1

The Book of *Shemos* begins with a list of Jacob's sons, who left Canaan and went down to Egypt. Seventy people in all went down to Egypt. After Jacob's sons are named, it is written that Josef died, and all of his brothers died.

The Jewish population grew by leaps and bounds. A new King Pharaoh came into power (or, according to some opinions, it is the same Pharaoh, who had taken on an antagonistic feeling toward the Jews). Pharaoh told the Egyptians that there are getting to be too many Jews, and that the time has come to "deal wisely with them" before they become too powerful. Pharaoh decided to turn the Jews into slaves, who will build his supply cities using bricks and mortar. But to Pharaoh's surprise, the more the Egyptians oppress them, the more the Jews increase in number.

Pharaoh summoned Shifra and Puah, the Hebrew midwives, and ordered them to kill all Jewish newborn sons, but to let the girls live. (Rashi tells us that this is because Pharaoh's astrologers saw in the stars that a male Jewish redeemer would soon be born.) Shifra and Puah, however, being G-d-fearing, secretly disobeyed the decree.

Aliyah #2

Pharaoh questioned Shifra and Puah: "Why did you let the baby boys live?" They tell him that they tried to obey Pharaoh's orders, but the Hebrew women give birth so quickly that there's no time for a midwife to arrive and help. Hearing this, Pharaoh issues a new decree: All baby boys must henceforth be thrown into the Nile River!

Next we read the famous story of Moses' birth. His mother, Yocheved, keeps her baby secretly at home for three months. Then she makes a special box in which to hide the baby. She waterproofs it with tar and clay, and places it in the river, among the tall reeds by the riverbank. Miriam, Moses' sister hides nearby to keep an eye on her baby brother.

Soon Batya, Pharaoh's daughter, finds the baby in the water (Rashi says her arm

miraculously stretches far enough to reach it), and she takes pity on him when he starts crying. She tries to find him an Egyptian nursemaid, but the baby refuses to nurse from any of them. Finally, Miriam comes out of hiding and offers to go get a Hebrew nursemaid. Batya agrees, and Miriam soon returns with her own mother, Yocheved! The baby is all too happy to nurse from its own mother, and Batya suggests that Yocheved bring him home until he weans.

When the baby turns two years old, Yocheved brings him to Batya, who adopts him and names him Moses, meaning 'drawn from the water.'

Aliyah #3

Moses grows up in Pharaoh's palace, but he knows he is Jewish. One day he goes out and sees an Egyptian beating a Jewish slave. Moses sees that no one is watching and he kills the Egyptian and hides him in the sand.

The next day, Moses goes out to the same place and sees two Jewish slaves, Datan and Aviram, arguing. One of them is about to hit the other. Moshe stops him, but the man doesn't appreciate Moses' interference. He chides Moses "What are you going to do, kill me, just like you killed the Egyptian?"

News travels, and Pharaoh heard about Moses crime. Moses runs away to the land of Midyan. There, by the well, he meets the seven daughters of Jethro. Moses wins their admiration when he stops some shepherds from blocking their way to the well. After he helps them water their sheep, he is invited home to meet their father. Moshe ends up marrying Jethro's daughter, Tzipporah, and she gives birth to a son, Gershom.

At the end of the aliyah, the Jews cry out to G-d about their enslavement, and G-d hears them.

Aliyah #4

Moses works for his father-in-law, Jethro as a shepherd. One day, while he is leading the sheep out into the wilderness to graze, he notices a thornbush on fire. He quickly does a double-take, because the bush is not being consumed by the flames.

When he goes closer to investigate, he hears G-d speaking to him from within the bush. G-d tells him that He has heard the Jewish' cries and He will now free them from their suffering in Egypt and bring them to a "land flowing with milk and honey," and that He has chosen Moses to lead the Jews out.

Moses expresses doubt that he is qualified for the task, but G-d reassures him that He'll be with him. Moshe wants to know what to tell the Jews when they ask who sent him, and G-d tells him to say that "Eheyeh" ("I will be") sent him.

Aliyah #5

G-d continues giving Moses instructions about what to say to the Jews, and He assures Moses that they will listen to him. G-d then tells Moshe to tell Pharaoh to allow the Jews to go out into the desert for three days to worship G-d. G-d says that He will cause Pharaoh to let them go -- and the Jews will take all of Egypt's riches out with them when they leave.

Moses is afraid that no one will believe him when he says that he has been sent on a mission by G-d, so G-d gives him three signs to use as proof.

(1) When Moshe throws his staff to the ground, it becomes a snake.

(2) When he puts his hand onto his chest, it becomes leprous, and when he does it again, it becomes normal again.

(3) When he pours water from the Nile onto the ground, it turns into blood.

Moses then insists that he's not a good public speaker because he stutters, and G-d tells him that Aaron, Moses' brother, will accompany Moses as his spokesman.

The conversation at the burning bush ends with G-d reminding Moshe to bring along his staff when he goes because with it he will perform the miraculous signs.

Aliyah #6

Moses leaves Jethro's house with his wife, their older son, Gershom, and their newborn baby boy. G-d speaks to Moses, telling him what to say to Pharaoh when he confronts him.

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BS"D

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Volume 1 Issue 10



By Rabbi Israel Meir Lau

Imagine, if you will, the difference between a homeland visit by

Julius Caesar and one by Moses.

Julius Caesar disembarks at Aeroporti di Roma in Italy and immediately senses that something is amiss. The people don't speak his language. The local religion is entirely different. And Rome is no longer the cultural capital of the world. He has nothing in common with the people of his land.

At Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, the scene unfolds very differently. An elderly Moses steps out of an airplane. He is overcome with emotion as his foot touches Israel's soil for the first time. Having led his nation through the desert for forty years and then dying without reaching the Promised Land, Moses finally has made it.

"Shalom," says a young, Russian-born airport worker who approaches him to offer help.

The mind and the heart make a good pair. The heart is an extremist: untamed, a single emotion will fill its entire space. The mind finds balance and harmony, even between opposites.

The mind is cold and aloof. To the mind, reality is a curiosity. But the heart lives in a real world where things matter.

When the heart listens to the vision of the mind, it too learns to carry a counterpoint of voices, even the voices of other hearts. When the mind listens to the depths of the heart, then its vision can go out into the world.

From the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Shalom," replies Moses, amazed that the language spoken in this wondrously modern place is the same one he spoke thousands of years ago. He notices a group of men praying in a corner of the airport. As he approaches them, he sees that each is wearing *Tefillin* and a *Tallis*. After they finish praying, Moses talks with them and examines their religious articles. They are the same as those he prescribed at Mt. Sinai.

Over three thousand years separate these men. One was born in Egypt; the others in Moscow, Ethiopia, New York, Casablanca, Bombay, Sydney, Paris, and Johannesburg. Yet they share the same language, faith, tradition, and life view. Moses turns his face toward Heaven and shouts, "Blessed is the Al-mighty, that my people are still alive!"

The Jewish nation has outlived empire after empire of would-be persecutors. Ancient Egypt, Persia, Ancient Greece, Ancient Rome -- where are they now?


What is the miracle of Jewish survival?

In 1939 the Jewish people were eighteen million, and we have not

yet recovered that number. The oppression of Jews, the Inquisition, and Holocaust are not the only reasons. We are losing our precious family members because of assimilation.

Our unified Jewish faith, history, and heritage are the key to Jewish survival.

We have survived throughout the ages because of the unbroken chain of our heritage. When the 25th of *Kislev* comes, the first Chanukah light is kindled in Leningrad and Helsinki, Melbourne and Ottawa. Jews all over the world come together to make the same blessing. On the 15th of *Nissan* all Jews sit together at a Passover seder. We eat the same menu, the same *matzoh*. Some recite the whole *Haggadah*, some a summary of it, and others sing a few songs. Three thousand three hundred years is a long time to keep the same menu.

May we as a nation increasingly appreciate our shared heritage, and may we derive increased strength from our unity. 

Adapted from a lecture by the former Chief Rabbi of Israel last Sunday afternoon at the Soloway Jewish Community Centre in Ottawa.

Candle Lighting

Ottawa

16 January 2004 at 4:29pm

Shabbat ends

Sat. at 5:28pm

Torah Portion: Shemos



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"We hope you enjoyed reading this as much as we enjoyed writing it."

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Thinking Jewish

Insights into the weekly Torah portion,
adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

This week we commence the Book of *Shemot* (Exodus), which begins: "These are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt."

This is not the first time the Torah enumerates the names of the Children of Israel. The sons of Jacob have already been tallied several times in previous chapters. Why, then, does the Torah list their names again?

The Midrash offers two explanations:

Even though they were in exile, the Jewish people did not change their names for Egyptian ones.

The Jewish people are likened to the stars, about which it states, "He [G-d] counts the number of stars; each one He calls by name." Aside from denoting preciousness and value, once something has been counted it can never afterward be nullified.


Chasidic philosophy explains that a person's name relates to his most external aspects rather than his innermost being. (The reason a person has a name is so that others can call him by it; he himself, however, does not really need a name.)

To a certain extent, this describes the Jewish soul after it descends into the physical world and is invested in a body. However, not all of the soul comes down into the physical world: its essence always remains above, united with G-d, while only its external reflection descends to the physical plane.

This is alluded to in the verse "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came to Egypt." The Hebrew name for Egypt, *Mitzrayim*, comes from the word meaning constriction and limitation. Only

the "name" of the Jewish soul, its outermost reflection, is subjected to the limitations of the physical world and the difficulties of the exile. The soul itself, however, remains unaffected and in full possession of all its powers.

The Jewish soul has never gone into exile. It is not contained or restricted in any way by the physical world, and its essence is always "free." Thus it is a perpetual source of strength for its reflection down below, enabling a Jew to overcome spiritual obstacles and cleave to G-d in all circumstances and situations.

It was this strength that empowered the Jewish people throughout their years in Egyptian exile, allowing them to remain faithful to their beliefs and retain their original Jewish names. Indeed, this is the connection between the two explanations in the Midrash: the Children of Israel were able to "stay Jewish" in Egypt precisely because the essence of the soul never goes into exile - a lesson that applies to our day as well. 



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During their journey to Egypt, Tzipporah circumcises their newborn son.

Later, G-d commands Aaron to meet Moses in the desert, and they meet at Mt. Sinai. Moshe fills Aaron in on everything G-d has told him, and together they go to the elders of Israel. After Moshe and Aaron demonstrate the three miraculous signs, the people are convinced that they are indeed sent by G-d to free them from slavery.


Aliyah # 7

Moses and Aaron came face-to-face with Pharaoh. They tell him that G-d has

him to release the Jews to make sacrifices in the desert for three days. Pharaoh refuses and tells Moses and Aaron to go back home and to stop distracting the slaves from their work by raising false hopes. (Rashi explains that since Moses and Aaron were of the tribe of Levi, which was not conscripted as slaves, they were able to come and go freely.)

After that, Pharaoh makes the Jewish slaves' labor even harder by forcing them to gather their own straw from which to make bricks -- and requiring that they still produce the same quota of bricks as before, when they were

given straw. Since the Jewish police officers refuse to pressure the slaves to work harder, they are beaten by the Egyptian taskmasters.

The portion concludes with the Jews complaining to Moses about the harsh treatment they are receiving. Moses seeing that things are not getting any easier for the Jews since his arrival on the scene, asks G-d, "Why have You done bad to Your people? Why did you send me here?" G-d replies that he will now see how, with a strong hand, G-d will cause Pharaoh to drive the Jews out of Egypt. 

Everyone Needs to Laugh Sometimes

A Reform Jew goes to his rabbi, very depressed.

"My son," he says, "has become very Orthodox. He goes full time to a yeshiva, and claims that everything in our house is unkosher, so he can never eat with us. And worst of all, he's influenced our daughter. She's left the house and gone to study in some super Orthodox seminary for woman."

"And what about your younger son?" the rabbi asks. "The one who was at Stanford."

"That's the worst case of all," the man answers. "He got hooked up with some Hasidim, and now lives at a yeshiva in Israel."

"Have you thought of checking your mezuzos?" the rabbi asked.

Are your jokes better than ours? send them to us: info@theluminary.com

A Tradition of Kindness

The First Class Passenger

The following story shows us the side of diversity that we are all working for. It is a pleasant twist to see that there are individuals who face discrimination head on, if only one small step at a time. Enjoy reading the positive side of diversity.

On a British Airways flight from Johannesburg, a middle-aged, well-off white South African lady had found herself sitting next to an African-American man. She called the cabin crew attendant over to complain about her seating. "What seems to be the problem madam?" asked the attendant. "Can't you see?" She said. "You've sat me next to a kaffir. I can't possibly sit next to this disgusting human. Find me another seat!"

"Please calm down madam." the flight attendant replied. "The flight is very

full today, but I'll tell you what I'll do - I'll go and check to see if we have any seats available in club or first class." The woman cocks a snooty look at the outraged African-American man beside her (not to mention many of the surrounding passengers).


A few minutes later the flight attendant returned with good news, which she delivered to the lady, who cannot help but look at the people around her with a smug and self satisfied grin: "Madam, unfortunately, as I suspected, economy is full. I've spoken to the cabin service director, and the club is also full. However, we do have one seat available in first class."

Before the lady has a chance to answer, the flight attendant continues... "It is

most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, however, I have gotten special permission from the captain. Given the circumstances, the captain felt that it was outrageous that someone be forced to sit next to such an obnoxious person."

With which, she turned to the African-American man sitting next to her, and said: "So if you'd like to get your things, sir, I have a seat ready for you..."

At which point, the surrounding passengers stood and gave a standing ovation while the man walked up to the front of the plane.

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel! 

Ask the Rabbi

Dear Rabbi Berger,

Is there a reason for keeping kosher?

-Debra N.

Boston, MA

Dear Debra,

Eating (and drinking) is a basic human survival requirement, next to air and shelter. If you were to add up all the time that you spent eating in one week, you would wind up with at least eight hours. That's a lot of time -- wouldn't you agree? Yet we eat throughout the day, every day, without even thinking about it (unless we're on a diet!).

Shouldn't eating be done with intelligence?

Enter kosher.

Contrary to public misconception, keeping kosher has nothing to do with nutrition or hygiene, though many kosher products are more nutritious and/or hygienic than their non-kosher equivalents -- keeping kosher is the means of finding G-d in your food.

With Shabbat, we can spiritualize time.

With the shul, we can spiritualize place.

With Tefillin, we can spiritualize leather.

And with kosher, we can spiritualize breakfast/lunch/dinner/snacks.

In his classic book *Think Jewish*, Rabbi Zalman Posner eloquently elaborates the above point: most secular, Westernized Jews think in secular, Westernized terms. This results in the notion that spirituality is restricted to certain times, or certain places, or certain rituals, and that "real life" exists separately, outside spirituality.


But according to Judaism, spirituality is all times, and all places. Even when you eat.

"Judaism is not a religion -- it's a way of life. There is no fact of life that Judaism does not have an opinion on. Because eating is a fact of life, Judaism says, 'Oh, you're hungry? Well, here's how to relate to G-d through the part of you that gets hungry -- eat kosher.'"

And so, keeping kosher is sophisticated, not slavish. By keeping kosher, we let G-d into that most basic necessity of life, bringing spiritual awareness into ordinary routine.

Now, that's eating with your brain.

Have a good Shabbos,

Rabbi M. Berger 

Next week's question: Why is the Challah dipped in salt before it is eaten?

Send us your questions: info@theluminary.com