



GENESIS

Bereishit
Noach
Lech Lecha
Vayeira
Chayei Sarah
Toldot
Vayeitzei
Vayishlach
Vayeishev
Mikeitz
Vayigash
Vayechi

EXODUS

Shemot 13 שמות

Vaeira
Bo
Beshalach
Yitro
Mishpatim
Terumah
Tetzaveh
Tisa
Vayakheil
Pekudei

LEVITICUS

Vayikra
Tzav
Shemini
Tazria
Metzora
Acharei Mot
Kedoshim
Emor
Behar
Bechukotai

NUMBERS

Bemidbar
Naso
Beha'alotecha
Shelach
Korach
Chukat
Balak
Pinchas
Matot
Masei

DEUTERONOMY

Devarim
Va'etchanan
Eikev
Re'eh
Shoftim
Teitzei
Tavo
Netzavim
Vayeilech
Ha'azinu
Vezot Habrachah



13 שמות Shemot

Overview

In the Book of Exodus, we see the seeds planted by the forefathers sprout: their descendants are transformed into a nation, receive their code of life—the Torah, and prepare to fulfill their mission in life by building the Tabernacle, God’s “home” on earth.

Thus, the Hebrew name of the Book of Exodus is *Shemot*, meaning “Names,” for through the events chronicled in this book, the Jewish nation and each individual Jew receive their “name,” their essential national and personal identities as Jews.

The key to this process is exile. Exile calls forth the individual’s hidden potential, his drive to survive despite the odds against him. In exile, a person cannot take life for granted; he must constantly decide whether to succumb or to overcome. The essential point of self-determination that lies dormant during periods of prosperity and freedom is bared and tested during exile. This is why King Solomon called the Egyptian exile “the iron furnace”:¹ it burned away the dross covering the innate Jewish soul.

The Egyptian exile was both physical and spiritual. In fact, as we shall see, the spiritual exile preceded and precipitated the physical exile, since every physical phenomenon is just an expression of its spiritual antecedent. The Jews’ physical exile entailed loss of autonomy and backbreaking bondage; their spiritual exile was enslavement to the host culture, which led to the loss of Divine consciousness and the loss of their awareness of God’s involvement in life. As we witness the descent of Jacob’s family into progressively more severe physical exile, we can read between the lines and discern their descent into greater and deeper spiritual exile.

As the spiritual and physical exiles both intensified, the Jews were forced to confront their identity. Many of them succumbed to assimilation and were lost, but others struggled to retain their Jewish identity: they tenaciously held on to their traditions, refusing to give up even such incidental aspects of their heritage as their Jewish names and their Jewish language.² The fact that they refused to give up even these external trappings of their cultural heritage indicated that they still nurtured their inner seed of faith in their destiny, even though they adopted certain aspects of the Egyptian mindset and lifestyle.

1. 1 Kings 8:51. 2. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:28; *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5737, p. 118.

OVERVIEW OF SHEMOT

This explains why the Book of Exodus opens with a list of Jacob's sons, even though such a list seems superfluous. We already know the names of Jacob's sons: we have seen them born³ and listed twice,⁴ the second time in even greater detail than here! Furthermore, this list contributes nothing to the narrative flow of the Biblical story. After we read how Joseph was interred in Egypt at the end of the Book of Genesis, the narrative should logically continue with how "the Israelites were fertile and prolific...and a new king, who did not know Joseph, arose over Egypt."⁵

The sages give three reasons why Jacob's sons are listed again:

- ♦ to stress that the Jews did not change their Jewish names to Egyptian ones, that is, that they refused to assimilate totally into Egyptian culture;⁶
- ♦ to inform us that God considers the Jews as precious as the stars, whom He also counts by name when they go into "exile" (at daybreak) and when they come out of "exile" (at nightfall);⁷ and
- ♦ to tell us that Jews are essentially good, for the Torah introduces righteous people with the formula "his name was x" and wicked people with the formula "x was his name."⁸ Here, too, the phrase "these are the names" precedes the list of proper names.

These reasons all highlight the unassailable core of Jewish essence, the seed of essence planted by Abraham that lay dormant during the exile. Because of this inner essence, the Jewish people are intrinsically motivated to fulfill their Divine mission. Their awareness of this precious quality inspires them to cling to their identity and resist the temptation to assimilate. In this context, listing the sons' names individually also alludes to the fact that every Jew has a unique purpose in rectifying creation.

So, we see that the emphasis on names alludes to both the condition of exile (i.e., that assimilation has progressed to the point where we are Jewish in *name* only) and the means to overcome it (i.e., that we possess a core-essence of Jewish identity that cannot be defiled).

Therefore, the first *parashah* of the book, which describes the exile—the spiritual descent the Jewish people underwent and the horrors of their enslavement—is also called *Shemot*, "Names," even though the list of names with which it opens emphasizes that the Jew's essence is beyond exile.

This dichotomy is part of the nature of names in general. On the one hand, names are arbitrary and reveal nothing about a person's essence: two entirely different people can have the same name. On the other hand, a person's name is *connected* to his essence and can *awaken* it. People focus totally when they are called by name (which is why people who want to influence or disarm us make a point of addressing us by name); people can be awakened from a swoon by calling their name; and according to Jewish mysticism, a person's name is the channel through which his existence and spiritual life-force flow into his body. Names exhibit this duality because our true essence is normally hidden

3. Genesis 29:32-30:24. 4. Ibid. 35:22-26; 46:8-27. 5. Exodus 1:7-8. 6. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:28; *Vayikra Rabbah* 32:5. 7. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:3. See Isaiah 40:26; Psalms 147:4. 8. *Rut Rabbah* 4:3. The idea is that an egocentric, boastful person brandishes his name, while a humble person is more self-effacing. For examples, see 1 Samuel 9:1, 9:2, 17:4, 25:25.

OVERVIEW OF SHEMOT

behind the many layers of social conventions and personality masks we have accumulated throughout our lives. Normally, the only time our true essence cuts through these façades is when they are of no relevance—when we are confronted with some challenge that either threatens our lives or strikes deep into the essence of our being in some other way. In other words, our true essence is accessed through the part of us that has the least to do with the persona we have developed to present to the outside world—through our name.

Once exile succeeded in revealing the inner essence of the Jewish people, they could proceed on to the next phase: the giving of the Torah. The exile was prerequisite to receiving the Torah because the purpose of the Torah is to teach us how to bring Divine consciousness into the most mundane aspects of reality, even those that appear to be antithetical to Divine consciousness. The Jewish people actualized their innate ability to do this, to overcome the forces opposing Godliness, in exile. Once the people received the Torah, they could proceed to actualize its message in the world; this was the essence of the Tabernacle.

The overall lesson of the Book of Exodus, the book of “Names,” then, is this: no matter how hard it may seem, we must not give up the struggle for Divine consciousness; the opposing forces are mighty but we have the power to overcome them. Self-sacrifice reveals the essence of our soul, and by revealing our soul and fulfilling its unique mission, we help usher in the redemption.⁹

9. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 843-848, vol. 16, pp. 34-37, vol. 26, pp. 301-305.

ONKELOS

1:1 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 דְּעָלוּ לְמִצְרַיִם עִם יַעֲקֹב גִּבְרָא רִאשִׁי
 בֵּיתָה עֵלֶּה: 2 רִאשֹׁנָה שְׁמֵעוֹן לְוִי
 וַיְהוּדָה: 3 יִשְׁשַׁכָּר זְבוּלֹן וּבְנֵימִן:
 4 דִּן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָד וְאָשֵׁר:

1:1 וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיִם אֵת
 יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ: 2 רִאשֹׁנָה שְׁמֵעוֹן לְוִי וַיְהוּדָה:
 3 יִשְׁשַׁכָּר זְבוּלֹן וּבְנֵימִן: 4 דִּן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָד וְאָשֵׁר:

RASHI

לכוכבים שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר ובשמותם,
 שצאמר: "המוציא במספר צבאם לכלם בשם יקרא":

1 ואלה שמות בני ישראל. אף-על-פי שמנאן בחייהן
 בשמותם חזר ומנאן במיתתן, להודיע חבתן שנמשלו

1. ישעיה מ, כו.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[continued...] and Israel. "Israel" refers to the primary *sefirah* of Divine consciousness, *chochmah* (because the word ישראל is formed from the same letters as the words לי ראש—"mine is the head"—the head being the seat of *chochmah*). "Jacob" refers to the *sefirah* of *chochmah* as it descends into *malchut*, the source of the two means of expression, thought and speech (because the word יעקב can be read as יעקב—"the *yud* [descends into] the heel"—the letter *yud* signifying *chochmah* and the "heel" referring to *malchut*, the lowest *sefirah*). In this context, "the sons of Israel" are the worlds produced by "Israel," or God's *chochmah*.

The difference between thought and speech is that thought is directed inward while speech is directed outward; we think for ourselves, we talk to others. Therefore, in order for consciousness to descend into thought, it is not necessary for it to change its orientation in any way. The spiritual worlds, existing within God's thought, constitute no more drastic a constriction of His *chochmah* than that of being articulated, i.e., of being present in *malchut*. In this sense, *Malchut* and the spiritual worlds that issue from it are on an equal footing vis-à-vis *chochmah*.

In contrast, in order for consciousness to descend into speech, *chochmah* must first be translated into emotion, for in order to relate to others, we have to put an emotional slant on what we know. We have to become motivated to share it with someone else. Thus, the physical world, resulting from God's speech, cannot be an expression of God's *cho-*

chmah directly, but only of God's *chochmah* as it has been first funneled through His emotions. Since the physical world results from this lowering of God's *chochmah* into His emotions, the Divine consciousness informing it is on a much lower level than that of *malchut*.

These two stages of exile are alluded to in the two verses that describe the Jews' descent into Egypt: "These are the names of the sons of Israel coming to Egypt, Jacob and his sons..."⁴ and "These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt... with Jacob."⁵ The first verse can be read to imply that "Jacob" is reckoned with his sons as one of the "children of Israel," while the second verse implies that "Jacob" and the "sons of Israel" are two separate entities. This is because the first verse alludes to the first stage of exile, wherein both "Jacob" (*malchut*) and the "sons of Israel" (the spiritual worlds) represent the constriction of "Israel" (*chochmah*) into expression—but do not entail any change of orientation from inward to outward. The second verse alludes to the second stage of exile, wherein "Israel" (*chochmah*) is now funneled through the emotions, and therefore "Jacob" (*malchut*) cannot be considered its "son" together with the other "sons of Israel" (the expression of God's *chochmah* in the physical world).

In this context, redemption from exile is the *direct* experience of Divine consciousness—*chochmah*—without it having to be limited by being forced into the articulations of thought and speech.⁶

4. Genesis 47:8. 5. Exodus 1:1. 6. *Torah Or* 49a-50d.

Prelude to Slavery

1 Even though the Torah enumerated Jacob's sons by name when they came into Egypt,¹ it does so again here, when they die, in order to indicate how dear they were to God: **These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt; each man and his household came with Jacob:**

2 Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah,

3 Issachar, Zebulun and Benjamin,

4 Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

1 These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt: As mentioned in the Overview, this verse tells us that the Jewish people held on to their Jewish identity despite the temptation to assimilate into Egyptian society. Our sages say that because they refused to compromise to the host culture on even such an insignificant aspect of Judaism, God deemed them worthy of being redeemed.

The same applies to the present exile: by holding on tenaciously to our traditions, even down to those that appear to be subordinate, we will hasten our redemption.²

This idea is alluded to in this verse. The word for "sons" also means "children," and the word *Israel* (יִשְׂרָאֵל) can be seen as an acronym for the names of the

patriarchs and matriarchs—Abraham (אַ), Isaac (יִ), Jacob (יַ), Sarah (שָׁ), Rebecca (רַ), Rachel (רָ), and Leah (לֵ). This verse can therefore be interpreted allegorically, as follows:

These are the names: We can be assured that our children will retain their Jewish identity ("names") and be proud of their heritage if—

of the children of Israel: we raise them as descendants of our holy patriarchs and matriarchs, even though they—

came to Egypt: grow up in an environment that is hostile to Jewish values.

And when they eventually leave their exile, they will do so with the same Jewish identity ("names") they had originally.³

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] These are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt...with Jacob: On the most fundamental, spiritual level, exile is synonymous with the articulation of Divine consciousness. The essence of Divine consciousness is intrinsically ineffable; in order to be articulated, it has to be significantly reduced in intensity.

As we have mentioned previously, for God, the act of creation is essentially an act of limiting His consciousness as He assumes the role of a "thinker" and "speaker." By "thinking," God creates the spiritual worlds; by "speaking," He creates our physical world.

By way of analogy: each of us knows so much that

it is virtually impossible to imagine conveying everything we know to someone else; it would take an infinite number of words. It is less obvious but equally true that it is also impossible for us to *think* all that we know; our power of thought is just as incapable of thinking about all that we know as our power of speech is of conveying it orally. If this is true of our own, limited consciousness, it is certainly true of God's consciousness.

Thus, Divine consciousness must be severely constricted in order to be invested into thought and speech; God's consciousness "goes into exile" in order to create reality. The dynamics of this process are alluded to in the two names of Jacob, *Jacob*

1. Genesis 46:8-27. 2. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5737, p. 118. 3. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6., p. 243.

— ONKELOS —

5 וַיְהִי כִּלְנֶפֶשׁ יִצְחָק יִרְדְּיָעֶקֶב שְׁבַעִים נֶפֶשׁ וַיּוֹסֶף
דִּיעֲקֹב שְׁבַעִין נֶפֶשׁ וַיּוֹסֶף דִּהְיָה
בְּמִצְרַיִם: 6 וּמֵית יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אָחֻיוֹ
וְכָל־דֹּרָא הָהוּא: 7 וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
נִפְיִשׁוּ וַאֲחֵילְדוּ וּסְגִיאוּ וּתְקִיפוּ
לַחֲדָא לַחֲדָא וְאִתְמַלִּיאת אַרְעָא
מִנְהוֹן:

5 וַיְהִי כִּלְנֶפֶשׁ יִצְחָק יִרְדְּיָעֶקֶב שְׁבַעִים נֶפֶשׁ וַיּוֹסֶף
הָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם: 6 וּמֵית יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אָחֻיוֹ וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:
7 וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד
וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם: פ

— RASHI —

וַיַּעֲשֶׂה מֶלֶךְ וְעַמֵּד בְּצִדְקוֹ: 7 פָּרוּ. שְׁלֹא הִפִּילוּ נְשׁוֹתֵיהֶם,
וְלֹא מָתוּ בְּשֵׁהֶם קִטְנִים: וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ. שְׁהִיוּ יוֹלְדוֹת שֶׁשָּׂה
בְּכָרֶס אָחֻד:

5 וַיּוֹסֶף הָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם. וְהָלֹא הוּא וּבְנָיו הָיוּ בְּכָלֵל
שְׁבַעִים, וּמֵה־בָּא לְלִמְדָנוּ? וְכִי לֹא הָיִינוּ יוֹדְעִים שֶׁהוּא
הָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם! אֵלָּא, לְהוֹדִיעַ צִדְקָתוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף: הוּא
יוֹסֵף הָרוּעָה אֶת צֶאֱן אָבִיו, הוּא יוֹסֵף שֶׁהָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

After their passing and the ensuing descent of Divine consciousness, infusing Divine consciousness into mundane reality became a difficult, arduous process. This was another consequence of spiritual exile.

The advantage of this descent is that, as we have seen, “the response from above is commensurate with the force of the impetus from below.” The Divine consciousness brought into the world through hard effort is higher than that simply emanated by a lofty soul; it permeates deeper and becomes part and parcel of reality. The effect the patriarchs had on the world, in contrast, was ephemeral. It passed with their passing. We have seen this same contrast with respect to the

lives and work of Abraham and Isaac. Here, it replays itself in a wider context: the contrast between the preparatory groundwork of the patriarchs vs. the permanent effect on reality actualized through the giving of the Torah—beginning with the exile preceding it.¹⁵

In a still wider context, the contrast between the Books of Genesis (the story of the patriarchs) and Exodus (the story of the people) is the contrast between the Divine energy with which God sustains creation and the Torah’s effect on reality. The former is constant, while the latter always infuses new, higher energy into reality.¹⁶

INNER DIMENSIONS

[6] And so did all of that generation: The souls of the patriarchs and Joseph were rooted in the world of *Atzilut*; those of the other sons of Jacob were also rooted in *Atzilut* but extended down into the world of *Beriah*. In the world of *Atzilut*, God’s presence is obvious; in the successively lower worlds, it becomes successively more hidden.

Exile is the disappearance of God’s presence behind the cloud of creation’s self-awareness. In our lives, we experience exile as the voice of our Divine soul being drowned out by the noise of our animating soul and our body as they loudly demand

their needs and wants. The purpose of exile is that we overcome this noise by refining our animating soul and our body until they no longer overpower our Divine soul and we can hear the voice of God in our lives.

It is therefore clear why the exile did not begin until Joseph and his brothers had died. Possessing souls openly rooted in the world of *Atzilut*, they were the antithesis of exile. Exile *could not* begin as long as they were alive. Only when they passed from the scene and the dominant consciousness was that of the lower worlds did the exile and slavery begin.¹⁷

15. *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5669 (5749 edition), p. 229. 16. *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 3. 17. *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5669 (5749 edition), p. 230.

5 Similarly, although the Torah has already told us that Jacob's immediate descendants numbered seventy,⁷ it repeats this fact here in order to contrast their small number at the beginning of their stay in Egypt with their prolific growth while they were there:⁸ **All of Jacob's descendants then numbered seventy**, including **Joseph**, who, although he **was living in Egypt**, was not corrupted by it and therefore was still a true son of Jacob.

6 **Joseph and all his brothers died, and so did all of that generation**, the first generation living in Egypt.⁹ The last son of Jacob to die was Levi, in the year 2332, at the age of 137. Once all of Jacob's sons had died, the Jews (except for the tribe of Levi¹⁰) began to neglect their traditions. One of the practices they abandoned at this point was circumcision.¹¹

7 **The Israelites were unnaturally fertile and prolific, they increased and became exceedingly strong**. The women gave birth regularly to sextuplets. Before long, **the land was filled with them**.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

5 **Then numbered seventy**: The Torah lists Jacob's descendants in two ways: by name and by count. A name reflects an entity's unique identity in contrast to other entities in the same group. In contrast, when we count the entities in a group, we focus on their common denominator—the fact they are all members of the same group. Their individual identities disappear.

By both counting the Jewish people and listing them by name, God indicated that He loves them both for each individual's unique personality and for their common Jewish identity, their shared, basic Jewish consciousness. By stating this fact just before the Jews descend into the bitter exile of spiritual and physical servitude, the Torah indicates that God's love for the Jewish people is in no way mitigated by the fact that He sends them into exile; although hidden, His love for them endures nonetheless.¹²

As will be seen later,¹³ this dichotomy became an issue when Moses was first sent to redeem Israel.

6 **And so did all of that generation**: There were, in fact, a few individuals who did live on into the succeeding generation, but they had no influence on the spiritual tenor of the times. They could not prevent the moral descent the Jews underwent after the first

generation of the exile died out, so they are reckoned as having passed with that generation.

This first generation of Jacob's descendants had been raised in the Land of Israel. The Land of Israel promotes belief in God, for its productivity depends on intermittent rain, and this encourages its inhabitants to pray for their sustenance. In contrast, Egypt is watered by the regular overflowing of the Nile. Although the Nile's overflowing also depends on rainfall, the river's source is far enough from the land of Egypt to give the impression that it is not dependent on heaven. The Egyptians therefore grew to depend on nature rather than on God.

As long as the generation that grew up in the Land of Israel survived, the Jews' belief in their dependency on God remained intact. After they died out, however, this belief waned, and the Jews gradually sunk into the Egyptian perception that success in life depends on following the laws of nature rather than on the supernatural laws of God.¹⁴

The patriarchs' spiritual effect on the world was direct; their Godly approach to life was so intense that their holiness permeated the mundane world by the sheer intensity of its radiance.

7. Genesis 46:27. 8. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 4, quoting Rashbam on 1:1 and *Da'at Zekeinim* on 1:5. 9. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 4. 10. Deuteronomy 33:9; Rashi *ad loc.* 11. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:8; see Rashi on Exodus 12:6. 12. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, pp. 7-8, vol. 3, p. 844. 13. Below, 3:13 and further. 14. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 15-16.

— ONKELOS —

8 וְקָם מֶלֶכָא חֲדָתָא עַל מִצְרַיִם
דְּלֹא מִקְדָּם גְּזִירַת יוֹסֵף: 9 וְאָמַר
לְעַמָּה הָא עֲמָא בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל סָגְן
וְתַקִּיפִין מִנָּנָא: 10 הָבוּ נִתְחַבֵּם
לְהוֹן דְּלִמָּא יִסְגֹּן וִיהִי אֲרִי
יַעֲרַעֲנָא קָרֵב וִיתוֹסְפוּן אִף אַנּוּן
עַל סָנְאָא וִיגִיחוּן בְּנֵא קָרֵב וִיִּסְקֹן
מִן אֲרַעָא:

8 וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף:
9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעֲצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ:
10 הָבָה נִתְחַבֶּמָּה לוֹ פַּן-יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה
מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שְׂנָאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה
מִן-הָאָרֶץ:

— RASHI —

בְּמִיָּם, שֶׁבָּרַךְ נִשְׁבַּע שְׁלֹא יָבִיא מִבּוֹל לְעוֹלָם. וְהֵם לֹא
הִבִּינוּ שֶׁעַל כָּל-הָעוֹלָם אֵינוֹ מְבִיא, אֲבָל הוּא מְבִיא
עַל אֲמָה אַחַת: וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ. עַל כִּרְחֻנוֹ. וְרַבּוּתֵינוּ
דְּרִשׁוּ: כְּאֵדָם שֶׁמִּקְלָל עַצְמוֹ וְתוֹלָה קִלְלָתוֹ בְּאַחֲרִים.
וְהָיָה הוּא כְּאֵלוֹ כְּתִב יְעָלֵינוּ מִן הָאָרֶץ, וְהֵם יִירָשׁוּהָ:

8 וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ. רַב וְשִׁמוּאֵל — חָדָא אָמַר: חָדָשׁ מִמֶּשׁ,
וְחָדָא אָמַר: שֶׁנִּתְחַדָּשׁוּ גִזְרֹתָיו: אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע. עָשָׂה
עַצְמוֹ כְּאֵלוֹ לֹא יָדַע: 10 הָבָה נִתְחַבֶּמָּה לוֹ. כָּל-הָבָה
לְשׁוֹן הִכָּנָה וְהִזְמָנָה לְדָבָר הוּא כְּלוּמַר הַזְמִינוּ עַצְמְכֶם
לְכָר: נִתְחַבֶּמָּה לוֹ. לָעַם — נִתְחַבֶּמָּה מִה-לַּעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ.
וְרַבּוּתֵינוּ דְּרִשׁוּ: נִתְחַבֵּם לְמוֹשִׁיעַן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל, לְדוֹנָם

2. סוּטָה יֵא, א. 3. שִׁם.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

10 Lest they increase: Pharaoh himself already stated that the Jews “are becoming more numerous and stronger than” the Egyptians. Nonetheless, what truly frightened him was not this, but the threat that their power increase still further.

Allegorically, the fact that the Jews were “numerous and strong” refers to the innate holiness within each of us, which is strong enough to subdue the material urges of our heart. By raising our Divine consciousness, we enable our Divine soul to control our animating soul and gradually refine it. As we have seen previously, the material urges of the heart are signified by the seven Canaanite nations.

Pharaoh was therefore not overly concerned with the Jews being merely “numerous and strong”—for the ongoing refinement of the animating soul did not threaten him or the evil he embodied. For just as Egypt was the prototypical exile, Pharaoh was the embodiment of egocentricity, the overblown sense of self that is the source of all other forms of evil and materiality. The day-to-day, ongoing refinement of the body and the animating soul that is accomplished by ascending the ladder of Divine consciousness does not strike deep enough to threaten egocentricity.

Therefore, what unsettled Pharaoh was the possibility that the Jews would “increase”: that they would go beyond their normal powers and attack the root of all

— A CLOSER LOOK —

[8] A new king: Even if it was a new pharaoh, it is inconceivable that he had not heard of Joseph—who died only a few years prior to this—and of how he saved Egypt from starvation. So in either case, this king was clearly very wicked. The difference lies in whether his primary offense was toward God or his fellow man:

If it was the same king, he sinned grievously against his fellow man, since he was personally indebted to Joseph and by enslaving Joseph’s countrymen he demonstrated exceptional ingratitude.

He was defying God less, however, since he could reason that since Jacob and the Jewish people submitted to his sovereignty, God would allow him to enslave them.

If it was a new king, his primary sin was against God: since the Jews never submitted themselves to *him* as their king, he could not argue that Divine providence allowed him to enslave them. However, he was affronting his fellow man less in this case, since he *personally* had not benefited from Joseph’s benevolent statesmanship.²⁷

26. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:10, 5:18. 27. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 8-10.

The First Phase of Enslavement

8 At this time, a new king, who did not know Joseph, arose over Egypt. According to one opinion, this was in fact a new king; others say that this was the same king, but that he acted as if he had never heard of Joseph.

9 He said to his people, “Look: the people, the Israelites, are becoming more numerous and stronger than us.

10 Let us deal cleverly with them and their God — who is clearly involved in their unnatural fertility — lest they increase and, in the event of war, join our enemies, fight us, and go up out of the land, or, even worse, take over the country and force us to go up out of the land.” In fact, the Israelites posed no real threat to the Egyptians. The Israelites knew that Pharaoh (or his predecessor) had promoted Joseph from slave to viceroy and graciously settled them in the best part of Egypt, saving them from starvation. They were indebted to Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and therefore entertained no thought of taking over the country.¹⁸

Rather, Pharaoh wanted to persecute the Jews for the simple sake of doing so. He hated what the Jews represented, and he was concerned that Jewish monotheism might prevail over Egyptian paganism. So, in addition to plotting how to decrease the Jews’ physical numbers and diminish their power, he devised a plan to sink them into Egyptian culture and make them forget their heritage. He consulted with his advisors, the chief three of whom were Balaam, Jethro (who would later be known as Jethro¹⁹), and Job. Balaam devised a progressive plan of increasing oppression designed to weaken the Jews’ birthrate. Jethro advised against this plan; Job was undecided.²⁰ Pharaoh accepted Balaam’s strategy. Jethro, seeing that he had fallen from the king’s favor, fled to Midian.²¹ Pharaoh gathered together all the Jews and addressed them: “Please help me today with this work.” He picked up a pail and a rake and began to make bricks. Most of those who saw Pharaoh doing this came forward to help him. Moreover, Pharaoh hung a mold for bricks around his neck. If a Jew declined to work, saying that he was too delicate, Pharaoh’s officers said, “Are you then more delicate than Pharaoh?” In this way they talked everyone into participating.²²

Nonetheless, the tribe of Levi refused to work, claiming dispensation due to their elite status as the people’s sages. Pharaoh and the Egyptians knew that Jacob had accorded his son Levi special status by exempting him from carrying his coffin,²³ so they accepted the Levites’ claim. Thus, the tribe of Levi remained exempt from slavery. Nonetheless, just as the Levites devoted their lives to Torah study in order to preserve the traditions for the rest of the people, the rest of the people fulfilled the Levites’ obligation to fulfill God’s prophecy to Abraham that his descendants would have to be slaves.²⁴ Therefore, the Levites reaped the rewards of Egyptian slavery together with their brethren, even though they did not actively participate in it.²⁵

When night fell, the officers asked the Jews to count how many bricks they had made. After they did so, Pharaoh said, “Good! Make me this many bricks every day!”²⁶

18. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 9. 19. Rashi on 18:1, below. 20. Rashi on Numbers 24:21, based on *Shemot Rabbah* 1:9; *Maskil leDavid* on Rashi here. 21. *Sefer HaYashar*. 22. *Sotah* 11a. 23. Rashi on Genesis 50:13. 24. Genesis 15:13. 25. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, pp. 818-822.

ONKELOS

11 ומניאו עליהון שלטונין
מבאישין בדיל לענואיהון
בפלחנהון ובגו קרוי בית אוצריא
לפרעה ית פיתום וית רעמסס:
12 וכמא דמענן להון פו סגן וכן
תקפין ועקת למצראי מן קדם בני
ישראל: 13 ואפלחו מצראי ית
בני ישראל בקשיו:

11 וַיְשִׁימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם
וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לַפְּרֹעָה אֶת־פֶּתֶם וְאֶת־רַעַמְסֵס:
12 וּבְאִשֵּׁר יַעֲנֵנו אֹתוֹ בֶּן יִרְבֵּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצֹוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל: 13 וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכֹפֶר:

RASHI

12 וּבְאִשֵּׁר יַעֲנֵנו אֹתוֹ. בְּכָל־מַה־שֶּׁהָם נוֹתְנִין לָב לַעֲנוֹת
כֵּן לָב הַקֶּבֶץ לַהֲרֹבוֹת וּלְהַפְרִיץ: בֶּן יִרְבֵּה. בֶּן רֵבָה וְכֵן
פָּרַץ. וּמִדְּרָשׁוֹ: רֹחַ הַקֹּדֶשׁ אוֹמֶרֶת כֵּן: אַתֶּם אוֹמְרִים
"פֶּן יִרְבֶּה", וְאֲנִי אוֹמֵר "כֵּן יִרְבֶּה": וַיִּקְצֹוּ. קָצוּ בְחֵייהֶם.
וְרֹבוֹתֵינוּ דְרָשׁוֹ: כְּקוֹצִים הָיוּ בְּעֵינֵיהֶם: 13 בְּכֹפֶר. בַּעֲבוּדָה
קָשָׁה הַמְּפַרֶכֶת אֶת הַגּוֹף וּמְשַׁבְּרָתוֹ:

11 עָלָיו. עַל הָעָם: מִסִּים. לְשׁוֹן "מַס" — שָׂרִים שְׂגוּבִין
מֵהֶם הַמִּסִּים. וּמַהוּ הַמִּסִּים? שִׁיבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לַפְּרֹעָה:
לְמַעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם. שֶׁל מִצְרַיִם: עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת.
כְּתוּבָה, וְכֵן: "לִרְבָּא אֶל־הַסִּכָּן הַזֶּה" — גִּזְרָה הַמְּמַנָּה
עַל הָאוֹצְרוֹת: אֶת־פֶּתֶם וְאֶת־רַעַמְסֵס. שְׁלֹא הָיוּ
רְאיוֹת מִתְחַלָּה לָכֵן, וְעִשָּׂאוֹם חֻקּוֹת וּבְצוּרוֹת לְאוֹצֵר:

4. ישעיה כב, טו. 5. סוטה יא, א. 6. שם.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

Even those who earn their livelihood in mundane professions can sanctify their lives and fully utilize them to fulfill their Divine mission of making the world into God's home.

In this regard, we can all learn from the Levites' behavior in Egypt. They knew that compromising even a little in spiritual matters would only lead to more compromises, eventually leading to physical enslavement. There is no sense trying to placate materialistic voices within or without by giving in. Rather, by holding our ground, we will remain invulnerable to the slavery of materialism.³²

12 But the more they oppressed them, the more they increased and spread: As we have seen,³³ one of the purposes of the Egyptian exile was to purify the Israelites from any evil or materiality hidden in their psyches, preparing them to receive the Torah. In order for us to appreciate and internalize the spiritual-

ity inherent in the Torah, we must purify ourselves of as much gross materiality and other forms of evil as possible.

In this light, it is not surprising that by oppressing them, the Egyptians not only failed to weaken the Jews, but in fact made them more and more prolific. The sufferings of exile only increased the power and presence of holiness in the world.³⁴

Furthermore, just as the sufferings of the Egyptian exile purified and prepared the Jews to receive the Torah, our personal sufferings throughout our lives purify and prepare us to receive the infinite Divine revelations that await us in the afterlife.

And in a wider context: our sufferings—both as individuals and as a people, throughout our present exile—have purified and prepared us for the sublime Divine revelations that will accompany the imminent, final redemption.³⁵

A CLOSER LOOK

[13] With backbreaking labor: When the Egyptians saw that conscripting the Jews to build storage cities did not succeed in checking their birthrate, they added mental demoralization to the hard work in order to break their spirits, correctly believing that this would weaken them physically, as well.

First, they made the men do women's work and the women do men's work.³⁶ The change in routine was unsettling, and both the men and the women found themselves ill suited to each other's jobs: the women were not strong enough to do the men's

work, and even though women's work requires less raw strength than men's work, the endurance it requires was more than the men were capable of.³⁷

Second, instead of having them build storage cities, they made them do work without purpose, simply for the sake of afflicting them. This was particularly demoralizing, for even if a person is forced to work hard, he can at least pride himself on having done the job well if there is a specific objective. But if there is no objective and the work has no end, it is both physically and mentally backbreaking.³⁸

32. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, pp. 488-89. 33. Overview to this *parashah*. 34. *Torah Or* 74ab; *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 51. 35. *Torah Or* 49a ff; *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 11. 36. *Sotah* 11b. 37. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p. 117. 38. *Sefer HaMa'amarim Kuntresim*, vol. 1, p. 210.

11 They appointed draft officers over them in order to afflict them with the chores they imposed on them, and thus the Jews built up the existing cities of Pitom and Raamses, making them fit to serve as storage cities for Pharaoh (see Figure 1). The capital city of Pitom had been named after a rock formation on the shores of the Sea of Reeds, which the Egyptians had named Pitom and marked the boundary of Egypt.²⁸

12 But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more God blessed the Israelites so they increased and spread, and the Egyptians were frustrated over the increase of the Israelites. This first phase of conscripted labor lasted about thirty years, from some time after the year 2332 until 2362.

The Second Phase of Slavery

13 Seeing that this degree of slavery did not curb the Israelites' proliferation, the Egyptians enslaved the Israelites with backbreaking, i.e., demoralizing and unusual labor.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

evil—egocentricity itself. He feared that “in the event of war,” in the course of battling the seven material urges of the heart, they would “join our enemies and fight us”—they would be inspired by their struggle against evil to strike at its very root.

The plan he devised against this was: “Let us *deal cleverly* with them,” meaning, “let us *outsmart* them by preventing them from using their minds to enhance their Divine consciousness—let us fill their minds with *our* culture and *our* wisdom, to distract them from the pursuit of Godly knowledge.” The common denominator of all worldly culture and wisdom is that it promotes the ego, focusing our attention on ourselves and thus diverting our attention from God. This way, Pharaoh hoped to keep the Jews at bay.²⁹

Jether (who would later be known as Jethro): Jethro's original name was Jether (“he who adds” or “he who gives preeminence”), indicating how he made sure to give preeminence to his intellect over his emotions. He was gifted with keen intelligence, and he used it for philosophical and theological inquiry, and moreover, he lived by the conclusions he reached.

Unfortunately, inasmuch as God's presence was extremely hidden in those days, his intellect led him to the pagan worship of nature. It was only much later that he eventually renounced idolatry,³⁰ as will be seen further on.³¹

The tribe of Levi refused to work: Unlike their fellow brethren, the tribe of Levi retained their

original enthusiasm for the Torah and assiduousness in its study. This saved them from being corrupted by the materialism of Egypt. Because they did not entertain any mixed loyalties, they were not impressed by Pharaoh's rousing speeches. They were able to both recognize his ploy and to resist it. Since they did not succumb to spiritual domination, they could not be subjected to physical domination, either.

The tribe of Levi is meant to serve as an example for all of us. Even though we cannot all be Levites literally, we can still emulate their total devotion to God.



Figure 1: Pitom and Raamses

28. See Rashi on 14:2. 29. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5669 (5749 edition), pp. 232-233. 30. 2:16, below. 31. *Sefer HaMa'amarim Melukat*, vol. 3, p. 59.

— ONKELOS —

14 וַאֲמָרְרוּ יֵת חֲיִידוֹן בְּפִלְחָנָא
קִשְׂיָא בְּטִינָא וּבְלִבְנִין וּבְכָל־
פִּלְחָנָא בְּחִקְלָא יֵת כָּל־פִּלְחָנְהוֹן
דִּי אִפְלַחוּ בְּהוֹן בְּקִשְׂיֵי:

14 וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת־חֲיֵיהֶם בְּעֵבֶדְהָ קֶשֶׂה בְּחֶמֶל וּבִלְבָּנִים
וּבְכָל־עֲבֹדָה בִּשְׂדֵהָ אֶת כָּל־עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ בָהֶם
בַּפֶּרֶךְ:

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Torah was given at Mount Sinai, the “body” of the Torah—its legal and homiletic aspects—were given openly, while the “soul” of the Torah—its inner dimension—was concealed from the masses. When the present exile ends with the final Redemption, the Torah’s inner dimension will be openly revealed. Just as the physical exile in Egypt purified the people and prepared them to receive the “body” of the Torah, the toil we subject ourselves to nowadays in learning the revealed dimension of the Torah will purify us and prepare us to receive the full revelation of the Torah’s “soul” that will accompany the final Redemption.⁴⁹

But instead of toiling in Torah, the Jews became lax in their Torah study because of the pervasive influence of the materialistic orientation of their host culture. In this context, the phrase *they embittered their lives* took on the meaning, “[the Egyptians] made their Torah study seem bitter to them” (for, as above, the Torah is the Jew’s “life” and source of vitality). When a person’s enthusiasm and concern is divided between spirituality and materiality, the spiritual gradually loses its savor. And when that happens, it is only a short step to full enslavement to the material.⁵⁰

Moreover, God has given us infinite powers—planted in our Divine soul—to fulfill our mission in this world. If, however, we mistakenly use these infinite powers for mundane ends alone (e.g., earning a living or pursuing status or popularity), their infinite nature can make us miserable. God intended that we limit our pursuit of mundane ends, concentrating on them only as much as is necessary to provide for our needs and to lead a balanced life. When we exceed the limits the Torah places on our involvement in these pursuits, we embark on an endless chase that will never leave us satisfied. What should have been the productive and satisfying job of earning a living becomes a cruel taskmaster, pushing us relentlessly after unattainable goals.

This is alluded to in these verses: by enslaving us with “backbreaking labor,” these pursuits “embitter our lives,” i.e., they sour our involvement with the Torah and its commandments, our spiritual lives. We siphon

our infinite powers into the finite, leaving ourselves unable to use them for our infinite, spiritual pursuits.

On a more subtle level, misdirecting the infinite power of our Divine souls *within the context of holiness* also “embitters our lives.” Each of us has a unique Divine mission, and if we allow ourselves to be persuaded to channel our powers into areas that are indeed holy but not meant for *us*, we also deny ourselves the exhilaration of fulfilling our Divine purpose.⁵¹

Finally, when the people began to neglect the study of the Torah and the fulfilling of God’s commandments, they eventually fell into the trap of idol worship. Their lack of enthusiasm in Torah study and the empty time their idle lifestyle afforded them left a void in their lives that they had to fill some other way, and the thrill and easy spiritual high of idolatry was eminently available in Egypt.

The lesson to be learned here is that the surest way to ensure that we not fall into the decadence of materialism is to be enthusiastically involved in Torah study and fulfilling its commandments.⁵²

Actually, this verse alludes not only to how studying Torah becomes an element of our spiritual exile, but to how prayer and acts of kindness do, as well. For we are taught that “the world stands on three things: on [the study of] the Torah, on the Divine service, and on acts of kindness.”⁵³ “Divine service” includes both the sacrificial service in the Temple and the prayer services that parallel it (and replace it when the Temple is not standing). Not only does the world in general stand on these three pillars, everyone’s individual life does, as well. Thus, going into exile means that all three take on the condition of exile:

They embittered their lives with hard labor: When we are in exile, we should feel bitter about how we are prevented or limited from living our real life—our Divine life. This bitterness provides the backdrop for our weekday prayers, in which we battle our materialist tendencies and try to overcome them. The greater our embitterment, the harder we fight to wrest our-

49. *Torah Or* 49a; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5627, pp. 89-90; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5658, pp. 82-83; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5737, pp. 117, 121.
50. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 2, p. 487. 51. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 848-852. 52. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 117, note 31. 53. *Avot* 1:2.

14 They embittered their lives with hard labor, making them work with mortar and bricks, as well as all kinds of work in the field. All the work they subjected them to was imposed with crushing harshness. This work indeed tired out the men, but the women were determined to foil the Egyptians' plans. They brought their husbands food and drink in the fields, and after they had eaten, took out their copper mirrors and had their husbands look at their reflections together with them. The wives thus brought their husbands to admire their beauty and aroused their marital passion. In this way, the people continued to be as prolific as before.³⁹

The Egyptians oppressed the people far beyond what would have been required to fulfill God's decree at the "Covenant between the Halves."⁴⁰ Thus, even though they were simply fulfilling God's plan, they were still culpable and God was fully justified in punishing them.⁴¹ Everyone in Egypt was happy to see the Israelites suffer, down to the maidservants and foreign prisoners.⁴² The Egyptians appointed taskmasters to wake up the Jews to work before sunrise.⁴³ This second phase of conscripted labor began in 2362. The people's leader at this time was Amram, Levi's grandson. In this year, his first child, a daughter, was born. He named her Miriam after the new "bitterness" (*merirut*) of the exile. Four years later, in 2365, Amram's eldest son, Aaron, was born.

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

14 They embittered their lives with hard labor, with mortar and bricks, as well as all kinds of work in the field: As the people gradually sunk into the Egyptian perception that success in life depends on following the laws of nature,⁴⁴ they began to become lax in their Torah studies.⁴⁵ Had they continued to labor in the study of the Torah, they would not have had to labor physically; they could have fulfilled the imperative of exile by toiling in their studies. This verse would then have had the following meaning:

They embittered their lives: they would have felt embittered over their lack of understanding the Torah, which is our life, and striven to understand it better—

with hard labor, i.e., by logical argumentation (the word for "hard" [*kashah*] being related to the word for "argument" [*kushya*]), and—

with mortar, i.e., by deriving new laws through a *fortiori* reasoning (the word for "mortar" [*chomer*] being related to the word for this type of reasoning [*kal vechomer*])—

and bricks, i.e., and by refining their understanding

of the legal material until they reached authoritative legal decisions (the word for "bricks" [*leveinim*] being related to the word used for this process [*libun hilchata*]), and—

all kinds of work in the field, i.e., by citing rulings from Mishnaic sources not included in the canon of the Mishnah (such a source being called an "external" source [*beraita*]).⁴⁶

They would have also replaced the unaccustomed labor (referred to above by the words "backbreaking labor") with learning harder and more than they were accustomed to.

Similarly, it is possible at all times to replace worldly toil with toil in Torah study. As the sages say, "whoever takes upon himself the burden of Torah study is relieved of the burden of earning a living."⁴⁷ We may still have to work, but our work will not be a *burden*; it will be blessed with God's guidance and assistance and not worry us. Rather, we will be troubled by and absorbed in the subject matter we are studying at the time.⁴⁸

The purpose of the Exodus from Egypt was the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Although the entire

39. Rashi on 38:8, below. 40. "And they will serve them and they will oppress them" (Genesis 15:13). 41. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, p. 31, from *Mishneh Torah*, *Teshuvah* 6; *Hasagot HaRaavad ad loc.*; Nachmanides and Bach aye on Genesis 15:13, etc. 42. See on 11:5, below. 43. Rashi on 2:11, below. 44. See on v. 6, above. 45. The Jews studied the Torah in Goshen; see Genesis 46:28. 46. *Zohar* 3:153a; *Torah Or* 49a. 47. *Avot* 3:5. 48. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 116 ff.

ONKELOS

15 ואמר מלכא דמצרים להיתא
יהודיתא דשום הדא שפרא
ושום תניתא פועה:

15 וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִיֻּלֶּדֶת הָעִבְרִית אִשָּׁר שֵׁם
הָאֵחָת שְׁפִרָּה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה:

RASHI

שם שמשפּרת את הולד: פועה. זו מרים, על שם שפועה
ומדברת והוגה לולד, בדרך הנשים המפוסות תינוק
הבוכה. "פועה", לשון צעקה, כמו: "כילדה אפעה":

15 לְמִיֻּלֶּדֶת. הוא לשון מולידות, אלא שיש לשון
קל ויש לשון כבד, כמו: "שובר" ו"משבר", "דובר"
ו"מדבר", כך "מוליד" ו"מיילד": שפּרה. זו יוכבד, על

7. ישעיה מב, יד.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[15] The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom was called Shifrah and the other Puah: Birth is the process whereby something fully-developed yet hidden is brought into revelation. Spiritual "birth" occurs when we understand something new about God and the emotional response "born" of this understanding is allowed to be revealed, to flower, and to flourish.

Just as the physical birth process is assisted by midwives, the spiritual "birth" of the emotions from the intellect is assisted by spiritual "midwives."

Our innate emotional capacities can be channeled in many ways: we can love and fear God, or we can love and fear any of the material aspects of life: food, clothing, shelter, people, prestige, money, etc.

We channel our emotional capacities into real emotions by thinking and talking about whatever we want to get emotional about. If we think about and discuss God, we will come to love and fear Him; if we focus on the material aspects of life, we will love and fear them.

Thinking and speaking are thus the two spiritual "midwives" that enable us to express our innate emotional capacity the way we choose.

When we think about a Divine idea, especially when we achieve a new understanding about God, this understanding is accompanied by a profound, sublime experience of delight. There is no delight so profound as a heightened understanding of God and how He is manifest in creation. Although the delight follows the new understanding and seemingly is a direct outgrowth of it, it is not an intellectual experience; it hails from a part of our souls

that transcends intellect. This transcendent seat of delight is the *sefirah* of *keter*.

The midwives are therefore termed here specifically "Hebrew [עבר] midwives" because they draw the emotions from "beyond" [עבר] the intellect; the word "Hebrew" means "beyond."

The first midwife was called *Shifra* ["beauty"], referring to how Divine thought and understanding elicit an experience of sublime delight in the exquisite beauty inherent in Divine revelation.

The second midwife was called *Puah* ["cooing"], referring to the power of speech (for cooing is an oral articulation), the second way we focus our emotional capacities on Divinity.

The suppression of Divine-oriented emotions is allegorically synonymous with Egypt. Egypt signifies the constriction of *binah*, since the word for "Egypt" [מצרים] means "constrictions" and can be read as "the constriction [מצר] of [the letters] ים." The numerical value of these two letters (ים) is 50, and we are taught that there are "fifty gates of *binah*."⁶¹ *Binah* is the mother of the emotions, as we have seen. Spiritual birth, then, is the process of overcoming the constrictions of Egypt.

Pharaoh therefore sought to prevent this "birth," since he was the king of Egypt, the earthly personification of its evil. He spoke to Shifrah and Puah, the experience of delight and the power of speech, and bid them not to focus on Divinity and facilitate the birth of holy emotions, but rather to stay focused on materiality and keep reality entrenched in material consciousness.⁶²

61. Rosh Hashanah 21b. 62. Or HaTorah, Shemot, pp. 2503-4, pp. 2844-5, Devarim, pp. 1328-1329; Torat Chaim, Shemot (ed. 5763), 25c.

The Third Phase of Slavery

15 Throughout their bitter exile, the Jews took heart from the fact that Jacob and Joseph had promised them that they would eventually leave Egypt and return to the Land of Israel. They were constantly reminded about this promise by the presence of the grove of acacia trees that Jacob had planted when he first came to Egypt.⁵⁴ Thus, about five years after the second phase of conscripted labor began, the Egyptians realized that subjecting the Jews to backbreaking labor had also not succeeded in crushing their spirits and curbing their fertility. So **the king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, one of whom, Amram's wife Yocheved, was called Shifrah and the other, their five- or six-year old daughter Miriam, was called Puah.** Yocheved and Miriam were known by these names since they "improved" [*shapeir*] the newborns (cleaning them and straightening their limbs) and "cooed" [*pa'eh*] to them, respectively. In fact, the Israelite women were so skilled in giving birth that they did not use midwives,⁵⁵ but in order to reassure them, Yocheved and Miriam made it known that they were available in case of any complications. Even though they were only two people, their reputation as wellborn and righteous individuals (who would be granted Divine assistance if necessary) was enough to reassure the entire population of birthing women.⁵⁶

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

selves from the chains of materialism. Arousing this embitterment makes prayer "hard labor" (or "hard service"), since it is indeed difficult to fight our inborn predispositions toward the luxuries and indulgences of life and find joy and exhilaration in Divinity instead. In this context, this part of the verse can be read: "[The material tendencies] embittered their [spiritual] lives [in accordance with the effort they put into prayer, their] hard labor."

With mortar and bricks, as well as all kinds of work in the field: This refers to our exertion in the study of Torah during exile, as was explained above.

All the work they subjected them to was imposed with crushing harshness: This phrase literally reads: "all their work through which they worked on themselves with crushing harshness." Thus, it can refer to the work we do on ourselves during exile. This refers to the third pillar of life, acts of kindness, for the most effective way of refining ourselves is by practicing acts of kindness toward others, breaking our innate selfishness.

But being kind will not refine us if we are kind to others only after we have satiated all our own needs first or if we allow ourselves to congratulate ourselves on our goodness. The Torah therefore tells us to work on ourselves "with crushing hardness." Pharaoh tried to

crush us by giving us work we were not accustomed to; we must crush our own egos by doing more good than we think we are capable of or than we think is called for. Again, the word for "with crushing hardness" [*befarech*] can be read as "with a soft mouth" [*be-feh rach*], referring to Pharaoh's rousing, patriotic rhetoric. In our context, the "soft mouth" refers to the gentle manner of speech we should cultivate in order to reign in the explosive outbursts of our animal nature, when it surfaces as anger or jealous indignation. By staying calm, we can break our innate selfishness and make real progress toward self-refinement.⁵⁷

15 **Jacob brought acacia trees to plant in Egypt:** Allegorically, Egypt is the archetype for all exiles, and acacia trees (a type of cedar) signify the righteous individual—as it is written, "the righteous will flourish like a date-palm and grow like a cedar in Lebanon"⁵⁸—and specifically the Jewish leader. Jacob is the archetypal Jewish leader⁵⁹ who, due to his heightened Divine consciousness, always exudes the presence of the Land of Israel, even when he is physically together with his people in exile. God "plants" these leaders in every "Egypt" so they can inspire the people not to give in to the pressures of exile and, on the contrary, build a Divine sanctuary in the desert.⁶⁰

54. Genesis 46:6; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, p. 146. 55. Rashi on v. 19, below. 56. *Hitva'aduyot* 5746, vol. 2, pp. 372-373. 57. *Torah Or* 51bc. 58. Psalms 92:13. 59. As alluded to by the fact that the letters that spell the word for "leader" (נשיא) can be seen as an acronym for the words "a spark of Jacob, our father" (נצוץ של יעקב אבינו) (*Megaleh Amukot* 84, beginning of *parashat Vayechi*; *Kehilat Yaakov*, s.v. *Rebbe*). 60. This is what the cedars were planted for. See below, 15:5. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, p. 147-148.

— ONKELOS —
 16 ואמר בד תהוין מולדן ית
 יהודיתא ותחזון על מתברא אם
 בר הוא תקטלון יתה ואם בריתא
 היא ותקמנה: 17 ודחילא חיתא
 מן קדם יי ולא עבדו כמא דמליל
 עמהון מלכא דמצרים וקיימא ית
 בנאי: 18 וקרא מלכא דמצרים
 לחיתא ואמר להון מה דין עבדתון
 ית פתגמא הדין וקיימתון ית בנאי:
 19 ואמרא חיתא לפרעה ארי לא
 כנשא מצרייתא יהודיתא ארי
 חבימן אגון עד לא עלת לותהון
 חיתא וילדן:

16 ויאמר בילדכן את העבריות וראיתן על האבנים
 אם-בן הוא והמתן אותו ואם-בת הוא וחיה: 17 ותיראן
 המילדת את האלהים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן
 מלך מצרים ותחיינ את הילדים:
 שני 18 ויקרא מלך-מצרים למילדת להן
 מדוע עשיתן הדבר הזה ותחיינ את הילדים:
 19 ותאמרן המילדת אל-פרעה כי לא כנשים המצריות
 העברית כִּי-חיות הנה בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת
 וילדו:

— RASHI —

"ויאמרו" לזכרים. "ותדברנה בפיכם" לשון "דברתן",
 כמו "ותדברו" לזכרים. וכן "ותחללנה אתי אל-עמי"¹⁴
 — לשון עבר — "חללתם", כמו "ותחללו" לזכרים:
 19 כִּי-חיות הנה. בקיאות במילדות. תרגום "מילדות"
 — "חיתא". ורבותינו דרשו:¹⁵ הרי הן משולות לחיות
 השדה, שאינן צריכות מילדות. והיכן משולות לחיות?
 — "גור אריה"¹⁶, "זאב וטרף"¹⁷, "בכור שורו"¹⁸, "אילה
 שלחה"¹⁹. ומי שלא נכתב בו, הרי הכתוב כללן: "ויברך
 אותם"²⁰, ועוד כתיב: "מה אמך לבאי"²¹

16 בילדכן. כמו בהולידכן: על האבנים. מושב האשה
 הולדת. ובמקום אחר קראו "משבר"⁸. וכמוהו: "עשה
 מלאכה על-האבנים"⁹ — מושב כלי אמנות יוצר חרס:
 אם-בן הוא וגו'. לא היה מקפיד אלא על הזכרים,
 שאמרו לו אצטגנינו, שעתיד להולד בן המושיע
 אותם: וחיה: 17 ותחיינ את-הילדים. מטפקות
 להם מים ומזון. תרגום הראשון: "וקיימא"¹⁰, והשני:
 "וקיימתון"¹¹, לפי שלשון עברית לנקבות רבות, תבה
 זו וכיוצא בה משמשת לשון "פעלו" ולשון "פעלתן",
 כגון: "ותאמרן איש מצרי"¹² — לשון עבר, כמו

8. ישעיה לו, ג. 9. ירמיה יח, ג. 10. פסוק יז. 11. פסוק יח. 12. שמות ב, יט. 13. ירמיה מד, כח. 14. יחזקאל יג, יט. 15. סוטה יא, ב. 16. בראשית מט, ט.
 17. שם, כז. 18. דברים לג, יז. 19. בראשית מט, כא. 20. שם, כח. 21. יחזקאל יט, ב.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[continued...] propensity of the enveloping energies to descend into the inner energies. Pharaoh knew that if the enveloping energies would be allowed to enter the inner energies, his higher source of power would be cut off. By killing the boys, he hoped to prevent this, and at the same time force the new-borns' life-force back to its source in the enveloping energies, where he could appropriate it for his own uses.

The female principle is associated with *gevurah*, the power that successively decreases the intensity of the inner energies so they can enliven and rectify

lower levels of reality. By keeping the girls alive, Pharaoh hoped to decrease the intensity of the inner energies enough so he could tap its lowest, residual levels.⁶⁷

[17] But the midwives feared God: i.e., the Name *Elokim*, which signifies *gevurah*, God's power to contract His Divine energy. It is this Name that enables God's *chesed* to be manifest in the world, since unless *chesed* is dimmed, its propensity toward infinite bestowal will make it overwhelm the world with God's beneficence. The midwives were thus afraid to contravene God's plan of revealing His *chesed* properly, so they let the boys live.⁶⁸

67. Or HaTorah, Shemot, p. 2511. 68. Or HaTorah, Shemot, p. 2506-2507.

16 Pharaoh's astrologers told him that the Israelites' redeemer would soon be born. When he heard this, he understood that he was not succeeding in his plan to wipe out the Israelites. He therefore sought to eliminate the would-be redeemer by having all the newborn Israelite boys killed. Furthermore, he realized that it was not enough to enslave the adults while allowing the children to grow up as Jews. He therefore decreed that the girls be raised as Egyptians. Assuming Yocheved and Miriam were practicing midwives, **he said to them, "When you deliver Hebrew women, look at the birthstool. If it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live."** Pharaoh did not disclose his plan for the girls to the midwives, since he hoped in this way to make it easier for them to kill the boys.⁶³ Later, when he expanded the scope of his decree and instructed the Egyptians to drown their baby boys, too, he articulated his plan for the girls explicitly.⁶⁴

17 **But the midwives feared God, and they did not do as the king of Egypt had told them;** on the contrary, **they provided the newborns with food and water and thus helped the boys live.**

- ◆ *Second Reading* 18 **The king of Egypt summoned the midwives and demanded of them, "Why have you done this, and kept the boys alive?"**

19 **The midwives answered Pharaoh, "Because the Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women. They are skilled in giving birth. They are like animals, who do not need midwives. Even if we would *try* to assist them, it wouldn't work: before the midwife would even get to them they would have already given birth."**

INNER DIMENSIONS

[16] If it is a boy, kill him; if it is a girl, let her live: As we have pointed out earlier,⁶⁵ the feminine principle of creation is the drive to make the world into a home for God, while the male principle is the drive to renew spiritual inspiration. These two principles are sometimes at odds with each other, but ultimately complement each other. In particular, if the feminine principle is not periodically re-inspired by the male principle, it tends to sink deeper and deeper into the materiality of the world, eventually losing sight of its task and furthering the cause of materialism for its own sake.

This is precisely what Pharaoh, the avatar of Egyptian materialism, wanted. He sought to do away with the male principle and propagate the feminine principle on its own, in order to sink the world's consciousness ever further into materialism.⁶⁶

Furthermore, faced with the increasing Jewish

population and concomitant increase in holiness in the world, Pharaoh felt his source of power being cut off. He knew that by killing the boys and keeping the girls alive, he would be able to siphon off Divine energy from the realm of holiness and use it for his materialistic ends. This is because evil can sustain itself in two ways:

- ◆ by ascending to access enveloping energies (*or makif*) before they are drawn safely into the inner energies (*or penimi*). At this level, there is still no distinction between good and evil, and both can lay equal claim to Divine beneficence.
- ◆ by descending to access the leftover dregs of the inner energies. At this level, the intensity of Divine energy is so low that evil's unworthiness is irrelevant.

The male principle is associated with *chesed*, the

63. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p. 111. 64. Below, 1:22. 65. See on Genesis 2:22. 66. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5687, p. 52.

— ONKELOS —

20 ואוטיב יי לחיתא וסגי עמא ותקיפו לחדא: 21 וזהו בד דחילא חיתא מן קדם יי ועבד לחון בתין: 22 ופקיד פרעה לכל עמא למימר כל-פרא דיתיליד ליהודאי בנהרא תרמונה וכל-ברתא תקימו: ברתא תקימו:

20 וַיִּטֵּב אֱלֹהִים לְמִילְדַת וִירְבֵּה הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֵמוּ מְאֹד:

21 וַיְהִי כִּי־יֵרָאוּ הַמִּילְדַת אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם

בָּתִּים: 22 וַיַּצֵּן פֶּרְעֹה לְכָל־עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל־הַבֶּן הַיְּלֹוד

הַיֹּאֲרָה תִּשְׁלַיְכֻהוּ וְכָל־הַבֶּת תַּחֲיוֹן: פ

— RASHI —

לפי שאינן מגזרתן של אלו, שהרי היו"ד יסוד בהן — "ישב" "ירד" "יצא" "ילך" — היו"ד אות שלישיית בו: וַיִּטֵּב אֱלֹהִים לְמִילְדַת. מהו הטוב? וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים — בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות, שקרויו "בתים" — "ויבן את־בית־ה' ואת־בית המלך".⁷⁸ כהנה ולויה מיוכבד, ומלכות ממורם, כדאיתא במסכת סוטה:⁷⁹ 22 לְכָל־עַמּוֹ. אף עליהם גזר. יום שנולד משה, אמרו לו אצטגנינו: היום נולד מושען, ואין אנו יודעים אם ממצרים אם מישׂרָאֵל, ורואין אנו שסופו ללקות במים. לפיכך גזר אותו היום אף על המצרים, שנאמר: "כל־הבן הילוד", ולא נאמר "הילוד לעברים". והם לא היו יודעים שסופו ללקות על מי מריבה:

20-21 וַיִּטֵּב. הטיב להן. וזה חלוק בתבה שסודתה שתי אותיות ונתן לה וי"ו יו"ד בראש, כשהיא באה לדבר בלשון "ויפעיל" הוא נקוד היו"ד בצירי שהוא קמץ קטן, כגון: "ויטב אלהים למילדת". "וירב בבת־יהודה"²² — הרבה תאנה. וכן "ויגל השאֲרִית"²³ — דגבוראֲדִן הגלה את השאֲרִית. "ויפן ונב אל־נב"²⁴ — הפנה והנבות זו לזו. כל־אלו לשון "הפעיל" את אחרים, וכשהוא מדבר בלשון "ויפעיל" הוא נקוד היו"ד בחירק, כגון: "ויטב בעיניו"²⁵ — לשון הוטב. וכן "וירב העם" — נתרבה העם. "ויגל יהודה"²⁶ — הגלה יהודה. "ויפן בה ובה"²⁷ — פנה לזאן ולזאן. ואל תשיבני: "וילך" "וישב" "וירד" "ויצא",

22. איכה ב, ה. 23. דברי הימים ב, כ. 24. שופטים טו, ד. 25. ויקרא י, כ. 26. מלכים ב, כא. ירמיה נב, כז. 27. שמות ב, יב. 28. עי' פ' מלכים א, א. 29. יא, ב.

~ A CLOSER LOOK ~

[21] He granted them dynasties: This was a fitting reward: The midwives saved the entire generation, from whom all subsequent generations of Jews are descended. Accordingly, God gave them a reward that lasted not just for the duration of their lifetimes but also for all generations.⁷⁸

She also prophesied: Even though Miriam was

only a young girl, she received a prophecy (a) that foretold the birth of the redeemer and greatest of the prophets, (b) that concerned not just herself, but her parents, and (c) that was given to her rather than to her mother or father. This shows that even at a young age she had already achieved an advanced level of prophecy.⁷⁹

~ INNER DIMENSIONS ~

[22] You shall cast every boy who is born into the Nile: When Pharaoh saw that his original scheme to keep diverting Divine energy away from the realm of holiness failed (because the midwives succeeded in keeping the Israelite boys alive), he needed to find another way to push the male life-force back into its source in the enveloping energies.⁸⁰ His alternative plan was to throw the boys into the Nile.

The Nile is synonymous with the River Pishon, the

first of the four rivers to issue from the "river that issued from Eden to water the garden"⁸¹ of Eden. As we have seen, Eden embodies *chochmah* and the "river" that issues from it embodies *binah*. The Pishon, being the closest river to branch off the river of *binah*, embodies *binah* as well.

Binah is the source of enveloping energies, so by throwing the boys into the Nile, Pharaoh hoped to return their life-force into the enveloping energies.⁸²

78. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 6. 79. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 59. 80. See above, on vv. 16 and 17. 81. Genesis 2:10-11. 82. *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, pp. 2507-2508, 2846-2847.

20 In reward for their acts, **God dealt kindly with the midwives**, as is stated in the next verse: He made them progenitors of the royal and priestly dynasties. Because the midwives foiled Pharaoh's plan, **the people continued to increase and grew very strong**.

21 **Because the midwives feared God, He granted them dynasties**. Miriam became the progenitor of the royal dynasty: King David is described as "the descendant of Efrat,"⁶⁹ who is identified as Miriam.⁷⁰ Yocheved became the progenitor of the priestly dynasty (through her son Aaron) and some of the Levitical dynasties (through her son Moses).⁷¹ In addition, **because the midwives feared God** and did not fulfill Pharaoh's charge, Pharaoh had to plant Egyptians amongst the Jews so they could hear when a Jewish woman gave birth and report this to him. He therefore **built the Egyptians houses** in the Jewish settlement of Goshen.⁷² Thus the Egyptians were able to discover the newborn boys and kill them. Seeing this, Amram said: "Why should we procreate for nothing?" He therefore divorced his wife, Yocheved, and the rest of the Jews followed their example. But their young, precocious⁷³ daughter Miriam argued that God's commandment to procreate must be followed regardless of what may or may not happen afterwards, and that while Pharaoh's decree affected only the boys, Amram had in effect decreed against girls as well. She also prophesied that her parents would bear a child who would be the Israelites' redeemer. This argument and prophecy convinced Amram, and he remarried Yocheved.⁷⁴

22 On Adar 7, 2368, Yocheved gave birth to a son, who would later be named Moses. The Egyptian astrologers saw that the Jews' redeemer had indeed been born, but that he would meet his end through water. (This vision was correct, but referred to Moses' trial with the waters of Merivah.⁷⁵) They therefore counseled Pharaoh to decree that the newborn boys should be cast into the river to drown. Furthermore, they knew from history that God punishes wrongdoers measure for measure. They therefore felt that the best way to thwart His plans would be through water, since He had promised not to bring another flood upon the world.⁷⁶ Since the astrologers did not know whether this redeemer was Jewish or Egyptian, they counseled Pharaoh to decree that *every* boy born that day be cast into the river, even the Egyptian ones.⁷⁷ Thus, **Pharaoh then gave orders to all his people: "You shall cast every boy who is born into the Nile, but you shall make every girl—including the Israelite girls—live as Egyptians."**

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

22 **You shall keep alive and raise them as Egyptians:** Thus, Pharaoh decreed that the boys be killed physically and the girls be killed spiritually. The fact that the spiritual decree is stated *after* the physical

decree indicates that spiritual death is worse than physical death.

Allegorically, the decree to throw the boys into the Nile also alludes to immersing them in Egyptian culture,

69. 1 Samuel 17:12. 70. 1 Chronicles 2:19; *Sotah* 11b; *Shemot Rabbah* 1:17. Evidently, a female descendant of Caleb and Miriam married someone in the line from Ram to Jesse (1 Chronicles 2:9-11; Ruth 4:18-21). *Chidushei Aggadot* on *Sotah* 11b. 71. Of course, all the descendants of Levi became Levites, not just Yocheved's descendants. But at this point, Moses had not yet been born, and Yocheved could only have been the ancestress of the priestly line through Aaron. As a reward for her fear of God, she remarried Amram (see below, 2:1) and gave birth to Moses, and thus became the progenitor of a Levitical line in addition to the priestly line (1 Chronicles 23:14). 72. A manuscript of Rashi's commentary cited in *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, p. 4, note 31; *Pesikta Zotarta et al.* 73. See 2:8, below. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 60. 74. Rashi on 2:1, below. 75. Numbers 20:7-13. 76. Rashi on 1:10. 77. *Shemot Rabbah* 1:24; *Sotah* 12b.

— ONKELOS —

2:1 וְאֵל גִּבְרָא מִדְּבִית לֵוִי וְנָסִיב יֵת בְּרֵתָא דְּלֵוִי: 2 וְעַדִּיאת אֲתָתָא וְיִלְדִית בְּר וְחֹזֶת יֵתָה אָרִי טָב הוּא וְאַסְמְרֵתָה תִּלְתָּא יִרְחִין:

2:1 וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בֵּת־לֵוִי: 2 וַתֵּהֶר האִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַתֵּרָא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנָהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים:

— RASHI —

מֵאָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים שָׁנָה הָיְתָה, שְׁנוּלָדָה בְּבֹאֶה לְמִצְרַיִם בֵּין הַחֹמֹת, וּמֵאֲתָם וְעָשָׂר שָׁנָה נִשְׁתַּדּוּ שָׁם, וּכְשִׁיִּצְאוּ הָיָה מִלְּשָׁה בֶן שְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה. אִם כֵּן, כְּשֶׁנִּתְעַבְּרָה מִמֶּנּוּ הָיְתָה בֵּת מֵאָה וּשְׁלֹשִׁים, וְקוּרָא אוֹתָהּ "בֵּת לֵוִי": 2 כִּי טוֹב הוּא. כְּשֶׁנּוּלָד נִתְמַלֵּא הַבֵּית כְּלוֹ אוֹרָה:

1 וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בֵּת־לֵוִי. פָּרוּשׁ הָיָה מִמֶּנּוּ, מִפְּנֵי גִזְרֵת פְּרֻעָה וְחֹזֶר וּלְקַחָהּ. וְהוּא "וַיֵּלֶךְ" — שֶׁהָלַךְ בַּעֲצַת בֵּתוֹ, שֶׁאִמְרָה לוֹ: גִּזְרֵתְךָ קָשָׁה מִשָּׁל פְּרֻעָה — אִם פְּרֻעָה גִזְרֵת עַל הַזְּכָרִים, וְאֵתָה גַם כֵּן עַל הַנְּקֻבוֹת. וְהַחֲזִירָה וְעָשָׂה בָּהּ לְקוּחִין שְׁנָיִם, וְאֵף הָיָה נִהְפָּכָה לְהִיזֵת נַעֲרָה. וּבֵת

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

the merit of the righteous women of that generation our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt.⁸⁹

In the present exile, too, we will hasten the Redemption by ignoring societal pressure to drown our children in the dominant culture and instead raising a generation of Jews faithful to God's Torah.⁹⁰

2 How good he was: As our sages teach us, this also means that Moses was born circumcised,⁹¹ indicating that his body contained no admixture of evil and therefore did not distract him with material or unholy sensual urges. He was thus fit for his holy calling from birth.⁹²

These two circumstances surrounding Moses' birth expressed his two qualifications for leadership. Being born circumcised indicated his unique spiritual stature and holiness. The house becoming filled with light when he was born indicated his unique ability to disseminate holiness (and even channel material goodness, as exemplified by visible light) to those around him.⁹³

Moses' essential goodness enabled him to focus on and draw out the good in others and prompted him to do so.⁹⁴

INNER DIMENSIONS

[2] How good he was: Typically, as a soul descends through the spiritual worlds on its way to its birth in the physical world, its Divine consciousness diminishes in tandem. This is only so, however, because the soul passes through the *external* dimension of each world it traverses, which differs from one world to the next. In contrast, the *inner* Divine energy of all worlds is the same.

Moses' soul descended via the inner Divine energy, and therefore his soul was not affected by its descent through the worlds. When he was born, his soul possessed the same Divine consciousness it possessed in its origin.⁹⁵

Circumcision transforms marital relations from an exercise in self-indulgence to a mature union of souls. Cutting off the foreskin removes the barrier of self-concern that makes us insensitive to others. Spiritually, then, circumcision is the ongoing process of *teshuvah*, our constant return to God.

There are two types of circumcision: the elimination of our gross lusts, which we can accomplish on our own, and the elimination of our more subtle lusts, for which we need God's assistance. In the

present order, God circumcises our inner heart in proportion to the extent to which we circumcise our outer heart. In the messianic future, God will circumcise our inner heart completely.

Moses was born circumcised, indicating that God had circumcised his heart and he was born free of both gross and subtle lusts.⁹⁶

Moses' soul was thus much loftier than the souls of everyone else in his generation. In particular, he was the one who nurtured their powers of faith (*emunah*) and knowledge (*da'at*) until they matured enough to forge a proper relationship with God.

For this reason, Moses is known as "the faithful shepherd," for just as a primary difference between humans and animals is that only humans can attain a mature belief in God and knowledge of Him, so did the rest of the people look to Moses to nurture their faith and knowledge of God.

The same is true in all generations: it is the task of the Moses of that generation to provide his generation with the tools to attain mature faith and knowledge of God.⁹⁷

89. Sotah 11b. 90. Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, p. 112. 91. Sotah 12a. 92. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5698, pp. 214, 225; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5701, p. 92. 93. Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 26-27. 94. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5700, p. 158. 95. Or HaTorah, Shemot, p. 59; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5630, pp. 56 ff. 96. Or HaTorah, Shemot, pp. 60-61. 97. Torah Or 74c-75b, 111ab; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5670, p. 120, p. 126.

The Birth of Moses

2:1 The Torah now provides the details of Moses' birth. As stated above, a certain **Levite man**, i.e., Amram, the grandson of Levi, **went and re-married** Yocheved, who was **Levi's daughter**. Even though she was 130 years old at this time, she miraculously regained her youthful beauty when Amram remarried her. The rest of the Jews again followed Amram's example and remarried their wives. Miriam's argument thus led to the birth of the generation of Jews who left Egypt.

2 **The woman** Yocheved **conceived** as soon as she and Amram remarried, **and** on Adar 7, 2368, she **gave birth to a son** prematurely, in the beginning of her seventh month. The Jews knew that God had promised to redeem them, and it was reasonable to assume that their redeemer would be born into a family of stature such as Amram's. Therefore, **seeing** that the room miraculously became filled with light when he was born, Yocheved understood **how good he was**, i.e., she suspected that he was destined for this greatness.⁸³ She therefore made extra efforts to save him from the Egyptians. First, **she kept him hidden for three months**. She was able to do this because the Egyptians came to inspect her home only when nine months had passed after she remarried.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

inasmuch as the Egyptians worshipped the Nile as the source of both their livelihood and their culture.

Furthermore, we will see further on that when there were not enough bricks to meet the building schedule, the Egyptians had the Jews immure their children instead.⁸⁴ Allegorically, this means cementing them into the institutional framework of Egyptian civilization.

Egypt is the prototype of all exiles; in all exiles, the rul-

ing culture urges us to raise our children in its ways, promising that this is the path to their material and social success. As in Egypt, we must resist this urge and ensure that our children grow up cherishing the Torah's values; *this* is what will ensure their material, social, and spiritual happiness.⁸⁵

1 **The rest of the Jews remarried their wives:** Referring to the women's efforts to conceive and raise children despite Pharaoh's decree, our sages state that "in

INNER DIMENSIONS

[1] A Levite man went and married Levi's daughter: The Torah does not mention Amram and Yocheved by their own names in order to allude to the following idea:

The relationship between husband and wife in marriage can be a union of equals or one in which the wife is subordinate to her husband. In the former, the husband-as-equal is referred to simply as the "man" (*ish*); in the latter, the husband is referred to as the "master" (*baal*). Ideally, husband and wife are equals, and this was the relationship between Adam and Eve before the sin. During exile—and its accompanying reduction of Divine consciousness—the feminine principle is subordinate to the male.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the union of husband and wife should ideally be a deep union of souls, rather than a merely physical, superficial union.

The nature of any Divine emanation that descends through the spiritual hierarchies into this world is determined by the arrangement and alignment of the *sefirot* and other channels it passes through. Our actions here below influence these arrangements and alignments, and thus affect directly the nature of the Divine emanations that reach our world.

Therefore, in order to draw down Moses' lofty soul from its spiritual source, Amram and Yocheved had to unite in the highest way possible: a union of equals, at the level of Adam and Eve before the sin, and a union of souls rather than just of bodies.

To indicate that he related here to his wife as an equal, Amram is called simply "a man [*ish*]." To indicate that their union was a union of souls, he and Yocheved are called "a Levite" and "a daughter of Levi," for the word *Levi* means "accompany,"⁸⁷ referring to this type of soul-union.⁸⁸

83. Mizrahi ad loc. 84. Below, 2:23. 85. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, p. 111. 86. Cf. Hosea 2:18. 87. Cf. Genesis 29:34. 88. *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, pp. 54-56.

— ONKELOS —

3 ולא יכילה עוד הצפינו ותקחלו תבת זמא ותחמרה בחמר ובזפת ותשם בה את הילד ותשם בסוף על שפת היאר: 4 ותתעב אחריו מרחק לדעה מה יעשה לו: 5 ותרד בת פרעה לרחץ על היאר ונערתיקה הלכת עליה היאר ותרא את התבה בתוך הסוף ותשלח את אמתה ותקחה: 6 ותפתח ותראהו את הילד והנה נער בכה ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה: 7 ותאמר אחריו אל פרעה האלד וקראתי לו אשה מינקת מן העברית ותינק לך את הילד:

— RASHI —

לו. ורבותינו דרשו: "הלכת" — לשון מיתה, כמו: "הנה אבני הולך למות"³⁵, הולכות למות לפי שמחו בה. והכתוב מסייע, כי למה לנו לכתב "ונערתיקה הלכת": את אמתה. את שפחתה. ורבותינו דרשו: לשון יד. אבל לפי דקדוק לשון הקדש היה לו להנקד "אמתה" — מ"ם דגושה, והם דרשו "את אמתה" — את ידה, ונשתרבה אמתה אמות הרבה: 6 ותפתח ותראהו. את מי ראתה. "את הילד". והו פשוטו. ומדרשו: שראתה עמו שכינה: והנה נער בכה. קולו כנער: 7 מן העברית. שהחזירנו על מצירות הרבה לינק ולא ינק, לפי שהיה עתיד לדבר עם השכינה:

30. גמא. 31. קניסוף. 32. ישעיה יט, ו. 33. שמואל ב יד, ל. 34. סוטה יב, ב. 35. בראשית כה, לב. 36. סוטה יב, ב. 37. שם.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

5 To bathe in the Nile: Both the nullification of the Nile's status as an idol and the nullification of the decree to kill the Jewish children (physically and spiritually) occurred as Moses was being placed in the river. This was no coincidence. As mentioned above,¹⁰⁶ the idolatry of the Nile was the belief in the laws of nature to the exclusion of the laws of God, and Pha-

3 ולא יכילה עוד הצפינו. שמנו לה המצרים מיום שהחזירה, והיא ילדתו לששה חדשים ויום אחד, שהיוולדת לשבעה יולדת למקוטעין, והם בדקו אחריה לסוף תשעה: גמא. "גמי" בלשון משנה. ובלעז יונ"ק³⁰. ודבר רף הוא, ועומד בפני רף ובפני קשה: בחמר ובזפת. ופת מבחוץ וטיט מבפנים, כדי שלא יריח אותו צדיק ריח רע של ופת: ותשם בסוף. הוא לשון "אגם". רוש"ל בלעז³¹, ודומה לו: "קנה וסוף קמלו"³². 5 לרחץ על היאור. סרס המקרא ופרשהו: ותרד בת פרעה על היאור לרחוץ בו: עליה היאור. אצל היאור, כמו: "ראו חלקת יואב אל ידי"³³. והוא לשון יד ממש, שיד האדם סמוכה

raah's decree was to immerse the Jewish children in this misguided belief and the culture it produced. This was only possible because the Jews' former belief in God had been weakened, and Moses' mission was to restore it. By restoring their belief in God, he imbued them with the power to resist the idolatry of the Nile.¹⁰⁷

INNER DIMENSIONS

[6] A boy was crying: Moses' lofty soul made him cry over the bitterness of the exile and the fact that Pharaoh was thwarting the revelation of Godliness

in the world. His crying aroused not only Pharaoh's daughter's pity on him, but also God's pity on the world. This helped hasten the redemption.¹⁰⁸

98. Shemot Rabbah 1:21. 99. Pesachim 25a; Mishneh Torah, Yesodei HaTorah 5:6-7; Shulchan Aruch 4:155. 100. See 1 Chronicles 4:17. 101. Sotah 12b. 102. Tzafnat Paneiach on 2:3; Likutei Sichot, vol. 6, p. 13. 103. Shemot Rabbah 1:24. 104. Shemot Rabbah 1:23; Me'am Lo'ez. 105. Likutei Sichot, vol. 18, pp. 132-140. 106. On 1:6, above. 107. Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 16-17. 108. Or HaTorah, Devarim, p. 328.

3 Then, **when she could no longer hide him, she got him a wicker basket and caulked it with clay inside and pitch outside.** She used clay to caulk the inside since pitch has a foul smell, and she did not want anything to corrupt or damage her child's sensibilities. **She placed the child in the basket, and placed it among the rushes near the bank of the Nile.** Yocheved wanted to place the basket in the river itself, since the Egyptian astrologers would sense this and think that their prophecy that the Jew's redeemer would be punished through water had been fulfilled, and Pharaoh would then nullify his decree that all the male babies be thrown into the river.⁹⁸ But she could not place the basket directly in the water, since the Egyptians worshipped the river and the Torah prohibits deriving any benefit from an object of idol worship.⁹⁹ Yet, she knew prophetically that it would soon be permitted to place it in the river, so she made it waterproof and placed it on the riverbank, trusting that God would see her plan to completion as soon as it would be possible to do so.

4 The baby's **sister, Miriam, stationed herself at a distance to see what would become of him.**

5 Just then, **Pharaoh's daughter Bitya**¹⁰⁰—who had decided to renounce idolatry—**went down to bathe**, i.e., ritually immerse herself in (lit., "on" or "concerning") **the Nile**, in order to spiritually cleanse herself of idolatry (including Nile-worship).¹⁰¹ By using the Nile to renounce idolatry, she abrogated its status as an idol. The basket then slipped into the river and floated into the princess' field of vision.¹⁰² As soon as the basket entered the river, the Egyptian astrologers sensed it—as Yocheved had predicted—and Pharaoh, thinking that he had accomplished his purposes, cancelled his decree to throw all baby boys into the river.¹⁰³ Bitya saw the basket and told her attendant maidens that she was going to see what it was. But **her maidens** opposed her. They said, "This is probably a Jewish baby, placed here by his mother in order to save him. How can you show any interest in its welfare? Should not at least the princess obey the king's decrees?" God therefore killed them; they **walked** to their deaths because of their conduct **along the Nile's edge**.¹⁰⁴ God spared only one maidservant, because it is not befitting for a princess to go about unescorted. Bitya **saw the basket among the rushes, and sent her one remaining maidservant, and she took it.** Alternatively, Bitya **stretched out her arm**, which then miraculously became long enough to reach the basket, **and thus took** the baby herself.

6 **Opening the basket, she saw the baby.** She also sensed God's presence surrounding him. Although the baby looked like a baby, he **was crying** with the voice of a mature **boy**. Because he was crying, **she had pity on him.** When she saw that he was circumcised, **she said, "This is one of the Hebrew children."** Bitya tried to use Egyptian wet-nurses to suckle the baby, but he refused. Because his mouth was destined to converse directly with God, God did not allow him to nurse from a pagan.

7 **Seeing that he would not nurse from an Egyptian, Moses' sister, Miriam, who had been following Bitya, came forth and said to her, "Shall I go and call for you a Hebrew wet-nurse to nurse the child for you?"** Although Bitya would have eventually discerned why Moses was not suckling, Miriam wanted to minimize his suffering.¹⁰⁵

ONKELOS

8 ואמרת לה בת פרעה איולי ואלת עולימתא וקרת ית אמה דרביא: 9 ואמרת לה בת פרעה הליכי ית רביא דדין ואוניקיהו לי ואנא אתן ית אגרר ונסיבת אתתא ית רביא ואוניקתה: 10 ורביא רביא ואיתיתה לבת פרעה והיה לה לבר וקרת שמה משה ואמרת ארי מן מציא שחלתה: 11 והיה ביומא האנן ורביא משה ונפק לות אחוהי וחזא בפלחנהון וחזא גבר מצרי מחי לגבר יהודי מאחוי:

8 ותאמר לה בת פרעה לכי ותלך העלמה ותקרא את-אם הילד: 9 ותאמר לה בת פרעה הילכי את-הילד הזה והינקתו לי ואני אתן את-שכרך ותקח האשה הילד ותניקוהו: 10 ויגדל הילד ותבאנהו לבת פרעה ויהי לה לבן ותקרא שמו משה ותאמר כי מן המים משיתוהו:

שלישי 11 ויהי | בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו:

RASHI

"משה" "בנה" "עשה" "צוה" "פנה", כשיבוא לומר בהם "פעלתי", תבא היו"ד במקום ה"א, כמו: "עשיתי" "בניתי" "פניתי" "צויתי": 11 ויגדל משה. והלא כבר כתב: "ויגדל הילד" ⁴²? אמר רבי יהודה ברבי אלעאי: הראשון לקומה והשני לגדלה, שמנהו פרעה על ביתו: וירא בסבלתם. נתן עיניו ולבו להיות מיצר עליהם: איש מצרי. נוגש היה ממנה על שוטרי ישראל, והיה מעמידם מקרות הגבר למלאכתם: מכה איש עברי. מלקוהו ורודהו. ובעלה של שלומית בת דברי היה, ונתן עיניו בה, ובלילה העמידו והוציאו מביתו, והוא חזר ונכנס לבית ובה על אשתו, כסבורה שהוא בעלה. וחזר האיש לביתו והרגיש בדבר, וכשראה אותו מצרי שהרגיש בדבר, היה מכהו ורודהו כל-היום:

8 ותלך העלמה. הלכה בזריות ועלמות כעלם: 9 הילכי. נתנבאה ולא ידעה מה-נתנבאה — הי שליכי: 10 משיתוהו. "שחלתה", והוא לשון הוצאה בלשון ארמי: "כמשחל ביניתא מחלבא". ובלשון עברי "משיתוהו" לשון הסירותיו, כמו: "לא-ימוש" ³⁸, "לא-משו" ³⁹. כך חזרו מנחם. ואני אומר, שאינו ממחברת "מש" ו"ימוש", אלא מגזרת "משה", ולשון הוצאה הוא, וכן: "ימשני מפנים רבים" ⁴⁰. שאלו היה ממחברת "מש", לא יתכן לומר "משיתוהו" אלא "המישותוהו", כאשר יאמר מן קם — "הקמותיו", ומן "שב" — "השיבותיו", ומן "בא" — "הביאותיו". או "משיתוהו", כמו: "ומשתי את-עון הארץ" ⁴¹. אבל "משיתו" אינו אלא מגזרת תבה שפעל שלה מוסד בה"א בסוף התבה, כגון:

38. יהושע א, ח. 39. במדבר יד, מד. 40. תהלים יח, יז. 41. זכריה ג, ט. 42. פסוק י.

INNER DIMENSIONS

[continued...] baby. Pharaoh knew that Moses' soul derived from the transcendent levels where good and evil can both lay equal claim to God's beneficence.¹¹⁷ He assumed that by adopting Moses, it would actually enhance his ability to divert Divine energy for his own purposes.

His mistake was that evil can lay claim to transcendent, enveloping energy only so long as it has not been drawn into the inner energy. Once the enveloping energy has been drawn into the inner energy, it has been harnessed for holy purposes and evil can no longer lay claim to it.

When Bitya drew Moses out of the water, she was drawing him out of the enveloping energy into the inner energy. Therefore, not only did he not enhance

Pharaoh's evil; he ultimately broke it entirely and liberated the Jewish people from its stranglehold.¹¹⁸

On a deeper level, Moses' soul hailed from the world of *Tohu*, which is an expression of *chesed*, as opposed to the present order of creation, the world of *Tikun*, which is an expression of *gevurah*. This is alluded to by the fact that Moses was drawn out of the water, for water is associated with *chesed*: *chesed* is the attribute of kindness, the desire to sustain and enhance life, and water is one of the most basic necessities and enhancers of life.

Moses' mandate was to temper the severe *gevurah* that constitutes the natural order of this world with Divine *chesed*, revealed to humanity via the Torah.¹¹⁹

117. See on 1:16, above. 118. *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, pp. 2509 ff, pp. 2847-2848. 119. *Torah Or* 51d.

8 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Go." So Miriam, although she was only seven, miraculously ran as fast as a **mature girl**—or even a mature boy¹⁰⁹—**and called the child's mother.**

9 Pharaoh's daughter said to Yocheved, "take this child and nurse him for me, and I will pay your fee." When she said "take this child," she used a word that can also mean "here is that which is yours," unknowingly acknowledging that the child was Yocheved's. **So the woman took the child and nursed him.**

10 Yocheved did not return Moses to Bitya when she stopped nursing him, but managed to keep him with her for quite a few years afterwards. She procrastinated by telling her that the child had grown attached to her and would be traumatized by having to leave her while young, and so forth. Thus, Moses grew up aware of his nationality and loyal to the traditions of his people. But **when the child grew up** to the age of 12 or so,¹¹⁰ and had attained an appreciable height, so that it was impossible to procrastinate anymore,¹¹¹ Yocheved **brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he was like a son to her.** She was very fond of him. **She named him Moses** [*Moshe*— "to draw out"], **for, she said, "I drew him out of the water."**

Moses Flees Egypt

- ◆ *Third Reading* **11 In those days, the precocious Moses was elevated** by Pharaoh to be the overseer of his personal household. Bitya was very fond of Moses and influenced her father to appoint him to this position.¹¹² Some years later, when he was 18,¹¹³ **he went out to his brethren and observed their suffering**, for he felt for them. **He saw an Egyptian taskmaster striking one of Moses' fellow Hebrews**, for this taskmaster used to beat this Jew constantly. When he would awaken the Jew before daylight to go to work, he would slip into his house and consort with his wife, who thought it was her husband. The Jew eventually discovered what was happening; when the taskmaster realized that the Jew knew what he was doing, he began to beat him all day. The Jew's wife's name was Shelomit bat Dibri.¹¹⁴

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

10 She brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he was like a son to her: Pharaoh and his court knew that Moses was an Israelite infant, but they assumed that if they raised him like an Egyptian, he would become one of them. In fact, however, due to both his

lofty soul and his upbringing while still a child in his parents' home, he stayed aloof from the enticements of Egyptian culture and the social status offered him, and remained true to his people. We see here how crucial is the early education of a child.¹¹⁵

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[10] I drew him out of the water: While dry land symbolizes the conscious mind, water symbolizes the pre-conscious mind, for all the mineral, vegetable, and animal life of the sea is hidden from view. The fact that Moses was drawn out of the water indicates that his soul was rooted in pre-consciousness. He was therefore innately predisposed toward contemplation and inner thought, focused on *cho-*

chmah, the experience of flashes of insight issuing from the preconscious mind, rather than on *binah*, the integration of insight into the perceptual world. It was for this reason that he had a speech impediment, as well, as shall be seen later.¹¹⁶

This is why the Pharaoh agreed to let Bitya adopt Moses, even though he knew he was an Israelite

^{109.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 11, p. 60, note 37. ^{110.} See *Shemot Rabbah* 5:2. ^{111.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 23. ^{112.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 24. ^{113.} *Seder HaDorot* 2386, from *Sefer HaYashar*. ^{114.} See Leviticus 24:11. ^{115.} *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 54. ^{116.} Below, on 4:10. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5689, p. 174.

— ONKELOS —

12 וְאֶת־פָּנָיו לְכָא וּלְכָא וְחָזָא אָרִי לִית גְּבָרָא וּמַחָא יֵת מִצְרָאָה וְטַמְרָה בְּחֵלָא: 13 וּנְפֹק בְּיוֹמָא תַנְיָנָא וְהָא תַרְיָן גְּבָרִין יְהוּדָאִין נָצְוּ וְאָמַר לְחִיבָא לָמָּא אֵת מַחֵי לְחִבְרָה: 14 וְאָמַר מֵאֵן שׁוּרָה לְגִבְרָא רַב וְדִין עֲלָנָא הִלְמָקְטְלִי אֵת אָמַר כְּמָא דְקִטְלָתָא יֵת מִצְרָאָה וְדָחִיל מִשָּׁה וְאָמַר בְּקוּשְׁטָא אֲתִידַע פְּתִיגָמָא: 15 וְשָׁמַע פְּרַעֲהָ יֵת פְּתִיגָמָא הָדִין וּבָעָא לְמִקְטֵל יֵת מִשָּׁה וְעָרַק מִשָּׁה מִן קֳדָם פְּרַעֲהָ וַיְתִיב בְּאַרְעָא דְמִדְיָן וַיְתִיב עַל בִּירָא:

12 וַיִּפֶּן כַּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַּחֹל: 13 וַיֵּצֵא בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁנִי וְהִנֵּה שְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים עֹבְרִים נֹצִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרִשָּׁע לָמָּה תִּכֶּה רַעֲדָה: 14 וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שְׁמִי לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשִׁפְטָא עָלֵינוּ הִלְהִרְגֵנִי אֲתָה אָמַר כַּאֲשֶׁר הִרְגֵּת אֶת־הַמִּצְרִי וַיֵּרָא מִשָּׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר: 15 וַיִּשְׁמַע פְּרַעֲהָ אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּבְקֹשׁ לַהֲרֹג אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וַיְבָרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי פְרַעֲהָ וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר:

— RASHI —

שָׁמָּא אֵינָם רְאוּיִין לְהַגָּאֵל: אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר. כְּמִשְׁמַעוֹ. וּמִדְרָשׁוֹ: 44 נֹדַע לִי הַדָּבָר שֶׁהֵייתִי תַמְיָה עָלָיו, מִהֶחָטָא וַיִּשְׂרָאֵל מִכָּל־שִׁבְעִים אַמּוֹת, לְהִיּוֹת נִרְדִּים בְּעִבּוּדֵת פָּרָה. אָבֵל רוֹאֶה אֲנִי שֶׁהֵם רְאוּיִים לָכֶּן: 15 וַיִּשְׁמַע פְּרַעֲהָ. הֵם הִלְשִׁינוּ עָלָיו: וַיִּבְקֹשׁ לַהֲרֹג אֶת־מֹשֶׁה. מָסְרוּ לְקוֹסְטִינֶר לְהַרְגוֹ, וְלֹא שָׁלְטָה בּוֹ הַחֶרֶב, הוּא שְׁאָמַר מִשָּׁה: "וַיִּצְלָנִי מִהָרֶב פְּרַעֲהָ." 45: וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְיָן. נִתְעַכֵּב שָׁם, כְּמוֹ: "וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב." 46: וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר. לִשׁוֹן וְשִׁיבָה. לָמַד מֵיַעֲקֹב, שֶׁנִּדְּוָג לֹא וּזְוֹג עַל הַבְּאֵר:

12 וַיִּפֶּן כַּה וְכֹה. רָאָה מִדֶּה־עֲשֹׂה לֹא בְּבֵית מִדֶּה־עֲשֹׂה לֹא בְּשָׂדֶה. וְלִפִּי פְשׁוּטוֹ, כְּמִשְׁמַעוֹ: וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ. עֲתִיד לְצֵאת מִמֶּנּוּ שְׁתִּתְּגִיר: 13 שְׁנֵי אֲנָשִׁים עֹבְרִים. דָּתֵן וְאַבְרָם הֵם, שֶׁהוֹתִירוּ מִן הַמֶּן: נֹצִים. מְרִיבִים: לָמָּה תִּכֶּה. אֶף־עַל־פִּי שְׁלֹא הִכְהוּ נִקְרָא "רִשָּׁע" בְּהִרְמַת יָד: רַעֲדָה. רִשָּׁע כְּמוֹתָהּ: 14 מִי שְׁמִי לְאִישׁ. וְהִרִי עוֹדֵף נַעַר: הִלְהִרְגֵנִי אֲתָה אָמַר. מִכָּאֵן אָנוּ לְמַדִּים שֶׁהִרְגוּ בְּשֵׁם הַמִּפְרָשׁ: וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה. כְּפִשׁוּטוֹ. וּמִדְרָשׁוֹ: 45: דָּאָג לֹא עַל שֶׁרָאָה בִּישְׂרָאֵל רִשָּׁעִים דִּלְטוּרִין, אָמַר: מַעֲתָה,

43. תנחומא שמות סימן י. 44. שמות רבה א, ל. 45. שמות יח, ד. 46. בראשית לו, א.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

12 So he struck down the Egyptian: Moses was being groomed for greatness in Pharaoh's household. He was slated to rise to an influential position in the Egyptian government and enjoy a comfortable and prestigious life. He nonetheless risked his life and his comfortable lifestyle in order to help his kinsmen.

Similarly, we should not hesitate to risk our own spiritual, social, or material comfort in order to help rescue our fellows who are suffering under spiritual or material bondage.¹²⁶

13 To the wicked one: Our purpose in life is to make this world into God's home. It follows that all our limbs and faculties were given to us for this purpose. When we use our hand to hurt another person instead of using it to fulfill God's commandments or perform acts of kindness, we betray our mission on earth and may justifiably be called "wicked," at least until we regret and repent for this misuse of our Divine gifts. In fact, this is true the minute we even *raise* our hand

against our fellow, even though we have not yet (and might not at all) hit him, for this act itself is already a misuse of the hand.¹²⁷

14 So the matter is known: Except for the tribe of Levi, the Jews had gradually fallen into idol worship as part of their assimilation into their host culture. Nonetheless, it was not idolatry but *slander*—a seemingly much less grave offense—that threatened to jeopardize their redemption.

This was because slander is symptomatic of a much deeper shortcoming, egocentricity. Egocentricity causes people to care primarily for their own interests and prevents them from subordinating their own interests to the good of others or to the common good. When this approach to social interaction is lacking, slander is the natural outcome.

Therefore, as long as there is slander, a group of individuals cannot become a cohesive nation. But this was precisely the purpose of the redemption—to forge the

126. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, vol. 1., pp. 784-788. 127. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, pp. 5-6.

12 Moses investigated what was happening: **he turned this way** and discovered that this Egyptian was beating the Jew all day; **and he turned that way** and discovered that he was consorting with his wife. **He perceived** prophetically **that there was no one** from the taskmaster's descendants destined to convert to Judaism, so he decided to kill him. **He turned this way and that and saw that there was no one** observing him, **so he struck down the Egyptian** by pronouncing God's Name,¹²⁰ **and hid him in the sand.**

13 But two Jews had indeed witnessed how Moses killed the Egyptian. **When Moses went out the next day** to see his brethren, **he saw** these very same **two Hebrew men**, Dathan and Aviram, **quarreling**. One of them had raised his hand to hit the other. Moses **said to this wicked person**, "**Why** are you going to **beat your brother**, even if he is wicked, just as you are?" Even though he had not yet struck him, he is still considered "wicked," for it is forbidden even to raise one's hand against one's fellow. Similarly, Moses called the victim "wicked," too, for by engaging in a heated quarrel a person inevitably exaggerates—and thus falsifies—his claims, even if they are justified to begin with.¹²¹

14 The **Hebrew man retorted**, "**Who appointed you as a leader and judge over us?** You are just a boy! **Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?!**" **Frightened, Moses concluded**, "**So the fact that I killed the Egyptian is known!** Pharaoh will hear about it and seek to execute me!" Besides this, however, **Moses was also afraid** that his brethren would not be found worthy of being redeemed, inasmuch as they were quarrelsome and willing to slander each other.¹²² **He said**, "**so the reason** for what I had wondered—why the Jews, of all people, have been made to suffer such severe bondage—is now **known.**"

15 **Pharaoh heard about the incident**, for Dathan and Aviram informed on Moses.¹²³ Pharaoh therefore **sought to kill Moses**. He had him tried, but although Moses had a speech impediment, he miraculously defended himself eloquently. Still, Pharaoh wanted to pronounce him guilty, but God struck him dumb. Pharaoh then tried to mumble his intentions to his ministers, but God made the ministers deaf. Pharaoh motioned to the executioners to kill Moses, but miraculously, the executioner's sword was unable to harm him.¹²⁴ God made the executioners blind, and thus **Moses fled from Pharaoh's presence.**¹²⁵ He fled to Ethiopia, where he joined the army and 9 years later was crowned king. He remained king of Ethiopia for 40 years.

In the year 2418 (while Moses was king of Ethiopia), certain families of the tribe of Ephraim, assuming that the 400 years prophesied in the Covenant between the Parts began as soon as the covenant was made (in the year 2018), concluded that they were over. Mistakenly believing that the time of their redemption had arrived, 30,000 armed men from this tribe left Egypt and set out toward the Land of Israel. They took money with them but no provisions, assuming they would

120. Rashi on 2:14. 121. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 24, pp. 152-156; note 35 there. 122. See *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, p. 9, note 17. 123. Since Moses had tried to kill the Egyptian when no one was looking, it is unlikely that anyone other than these two had seen him. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 36, p. 1, note 8. 124. Rashi on 18:4, below. 125. Rashi on 4:11, below.

— ONKELOS —

16 וְלִכְהֵן מִדִּין שִׁבְעַת שָׁבַע בָּנָן
וְאַתָּא וְדִלְאָה וּמִלְאָה יֵת רְהִטִּיא
לְאַשְׁקָאָה עֲנֵא דְאַבוּהוֹן: 17 וְאַתָּו
רְעִיא וְטִרְדָּנָן וְקָם מִשָּׁה וּפְרָקְנָן
וְאַשְׁקִי יֵת עֲנֵהוֹן: 18 וְאַתָּאָה לֹת
רְעוּאֵל אֲבוּהוֹן וְאַמֵּר מָה דִּין
אוֹחִיתָן לְמִיתִי יוֹמָא דִּין:

16 וְלִכְהֵן מִדִּין שִׁבְעַת שָׁבַע בָּנָן וְתִבְאָה וְתִדְלָה
וְתִמְלָאָה אֶת־הָרֶהֱטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת צֵאן אֲבִיהֶן:
17 וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרָעִים וַיִּגְרָשׁוּם וַיָּקָם מֹשֶׁה וַיַּשְׁעֵן וַיִּשְׁק אֶת־
צֵאָנָם: 18 וְתִבְאָה אֶל־רְעוּאֵל אֲבִיהֶן וַיֹּאמֶר מִדִּין
מִהֲרַתָּן בָּא הַיּוֹם:

— RASHI —

16 וְלִכְהֵן מִדִּין. רַב שָׁבַהֲן, וּפִרְשׁ לֹ מַעְבֻּדָּה זָרָה, וַיְנַדְּוּהוּ מֵאַצָּלָם: אֶת־הָרֶהֱטִים. אֶת בְּרִיכוֹת מְרוֹצוֹת הַמַּיִם, הַעֲשׂוֹיֹת בְּאֶרֶץ: 17 וַיִּגְרָשׁוּם. מִפְּנֵי הַנְּדוּי:

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Jewish people into a nation.

It was therefore necessary to crush the people's egocentricity, and the most effective way of doing this was to subject them to slavery. Thus, when Moses saw that his brethren were slanderous, he understood why they had to suffer the Egyptian bondage. Indeed, the bondage did eventually quash their egocentricity and they stopped slandering each other.

Actually, the fact that the Jews had fallen into idolatry and were thus morally indistinguishable from their Egyptian hosts served to highlight the fact that God chose them as His people out of His own free choice, rather than because of any merit on their part. But the fact that they had fallen into slander meant that they were not acting as a *nation*, i.e., that effectively they did not exist as an entity that God could choose.

True, other peoples engage in slander and this does not keep them from joining together to form a nation. But the Jewish people's nationhood is much more spiritually-based than that of other peoples, so any lack of unity is much more detrimental to it.¹³⁴

14-15 Frightened...Pharaoh sought to kill Moses: This implies that had Moses not been frightened, Pharaoh would *not* have sought to kill him.

Belief in God's omnipotence implies belief that He can rescue us from any type of trouble—even if there seems to be no natural way out. If, in addition to believing that He *can* help us, we confidently trust that He *indeed will* help us, we thereby earn His helpful intervention in the natural course of events. As the Tzemach Tzedek put it: "Think good and it will be good."¹³⁵

Here, Moses had done two good things: he had defended the Jew from the Egyptian who was hitting him and he had rebuked the Jew who was about to beat his fellow. Since he was fulfilling God's will in doing these good acts, he should have trusted in God's protection and been confident that his acts would not have any negative repercussions. But because he did not trust in God's protection, he forfeited it, and therefore Pharaoh indeed heard about the incident and sought to kill him. Had Moses not been afraid—and not articulated this fear—nothing would have happened.

The lesson for us is that when we are confronted with obstacles in fulfilling our Divine mission, we should realize that we ourselves can nullify them by trusting in God to help us. Evincing such confidence does not mean that we should not take whatever natural steps are necessary to avoid trouble or solve our problems. It merely means that we should trust God to crown our efforts with success.

If He does not, we must believe—after the fact—that this is His way of lovingly cleansing us from the effects of our wrongdoings, so that they not prevent us from receiving His further beneficence in this world or the next. But *before* the fact, we must believe that our confidence that God will show us His goodness and mercy will outweigh any demerits we might have accrued by previous wrongdoings and will nullify the need for such cleansing.

Our sages teach us that it was in the merit of their confident trust in God that the Jews were delivered from Egypt.¹³⁶ So, too, our confidence that God will redeem us from the present exile will itself hasten the Redemption.¹³⁷

134. Likutei Sichot, vol. 31, pp. 8-14. 135. Igrot Kodesh Admor HaRayatz, vol. 2, p. 537; vol. 7, p. 197. 136. Midrash Tehilim 22. 137. Likutei Sichot, vol. 36, pp. 1-6, based on Chovot HaLevavot, Sha'ar HaBitachon 2, 3; Ikarim 4:46; Kad HaKemach, s.v. Bitachon, etc.

either buy food from the Philistines or conquer their country. But the Philistines defeated them instead, and killed them all except for ten individuals who returned to Egypt to report the events.¹²⁸

While Moses was in Ethiopia, Miriam married Caleb, son of Yefuneh, of the tribe of Judah, and they had a son whom they named Hur.¹²⁹

In the year 2434, at the age of 67,¹³⁰ Moses left Ethiopia **and settled in the land of Midian**. He thought it was time to get married, so **he sat down near a well**, following the example of his ancestor Jacob, who found his wife at a well (see Figure 2).

Moses Settles in Midian

16 Now Jether, Pharaoh's former advisor, had become **the priest** and leader of **Midian** after he fled from Pharaoh.¹³¹ But he later realized the folly of idolatry, so he renounced the idolatrous religion of Midian. Because of this, the Midianites excommunicated him and his family. He **had seven daughters** and no sons, and since the Midianites had ostracized him, his daughters had to tend his flocks. **They came to this well, drew water, and filled the troughs to water their father's flocks,**

17 but shepherds came and drove them away because their family had been excommunicated. **Moses arose and rescued them, and then watered their flocks.** As soon as he started to draw water from the well, the water level miraculously rose on its own.

18 When they came home to their patriarch Reuel, i.e., Jether—who was also known as "Reuel" ("friend of God")¹³² because he had renounced idolatry¹³³—he asked, "How is it that you came home so early today?"

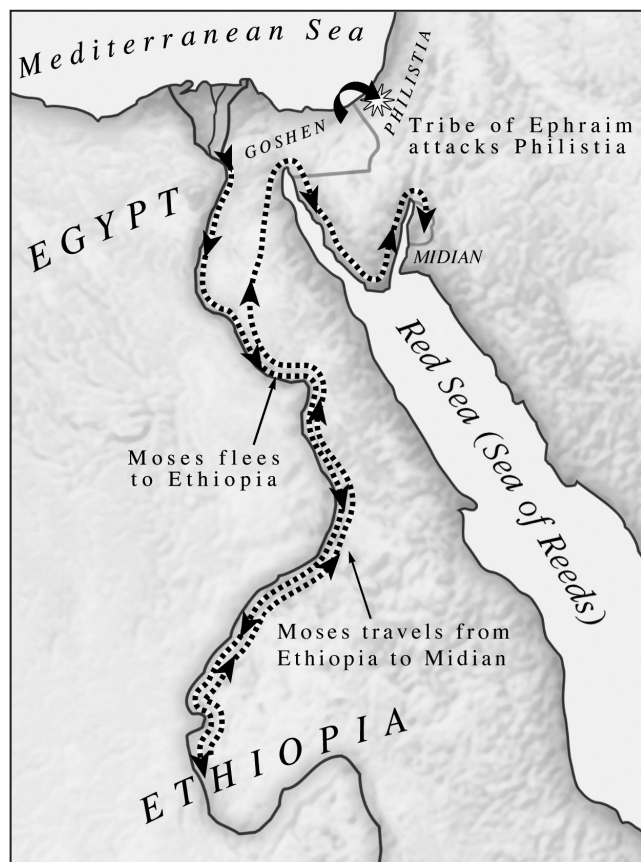


Figure 2: Moses flees from Egypt

¹²⁸. Rashi on 15:14, below; 1 Chronicles 7:21; *Seder HaDorot*, s.v. 2418. ¹²⁹. 1 Chronicles 2:19; *Sotah* 11b. ¹³⁰. *Seder HaDorot* 2392, 2395, 2438, from *Sefer HaYashar*. ¹³¹. Above, on 1:10. ¹³². Rashi on 4:18, 18:1. ¹³³. *Sifrei*, *Beha'alotecha* 20.

ONKELOS
 19 ואמר גברא מצראה שזכנא
 מיד רעיא ואף מדלא דלא לנא
 ואשקי ית ענא: 20 ואמר לבנתה
 ואן הוא למא דין שבקתון ית גברא
 קרן לה ויכול לחמא: 21 וצבי
 מלשה למתב עם גברא ויהב ית
 צפורה ברתה למשה: 22 וילידת
 בר וקרא ית שמה גרשם ארי אמר
 דיר הויתי בארע נוכרא: 23 והיה
 ביומא סגיאא האנן ומית מלכא
 דמצרים ואתנחו בני ישראל
 מן פלחנא דהוה קשי עליהון
 וזעקו וסליקת קבילתהון לקדם
 יי מן פלחנא: 24 ושמיצ קדם יי
 ית קבילתהון ודכיר יי ית קימה
 דעם אברהם דעם יצחק ודעם
 יעקב: 25 וגלי קדם יי שעבודא
 דבני ישראל ואמר במימרה
 למפרקוהו יי:

19 ותאמר איש מצרי הצילנו מיד הרעים וגם דלה
 דלה לנו וישק את-הצאן: 20 ואמר אל-בנתיו ואין
 למה זה עזבתן את-האיש קראן לו ויאכל לחם:
 21 ויאל משה לשבת את-האיש ויתן את-צפורה בתו
 למשה: 22 ותלד בן ויקרא את-שמו גרשם כי אמר גר
 הייתי בארץ נכריה: פ
 23 ויהי בימים הרבים ההם וימת מלך מצרים
 ויאנחו בני-ישראל מן-העבדה ויזעקו ותעל שועתם
 אל-אלהים מן-העבדה: 24 וישמע אלהים את-
 נאקתם ויזכר אלהים את-בריתו את-אברהם את-
 יצחק ואת-יעקב: 25 וירא אלהים את-בני ישראל
 וידע אלהים: ס

RASHI

במדיו וימת מלך מצרים, והצרכו ישראל לתשועה,
 ומשה היה רועה וגו' ובאת תשועה על ידו, לכה נסמכו
 פרשיות הללו: וימת מלך מצרים. נצטרע והיה שוחט
 תינוקות ישראל ורוחץ בדםם: 24 נאקתם, צעקתם,
 וכן: "מעיר מתים ונאקו": 52 את-בריתו את-אברהם.
 עם אברהם: 25 וידע אלהים. נתן עליהם לב, ולא
 העלים עיניו:

20 למה זה עזבתן. הכיר בו שהוא מורעו של יעקב,
 שהמים עולים לקראתו: ויאכל לחם. שמה ישא אחת
 מקם, כמה דאת אמר: "כי אם-הלחם אשר-הוא
 אוכל". 47 ויאל. בתרגומו, ודומה לו: "הוא-לנא
 ולין". 48 "ולו הוא-לנו". 49 "הוא-לתי לדבר". 50 ומדרשו
 לשון "אלה", נשבע לו שלא יזוז ממדיו כי אם
 ברשותו: 23 ויהי בימים הרבים ההם. שהיה משה גר

47. בראשית לט, ו. 48. שופטים יט, ו. 49. יהושע ז, ו. 50. בראשית יח, כו. 51. שמות רבה א, לו. 52. איוב כד, יב.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

23 The pleas...rose up before God: When their suffering reached this point, they finally turned to God and began to ask Him to save them from it. God relates to us as we relate to Him, so as soon as they remembered

Him and addressed Him as their father, He took note of them and evinced His fatherly love for His children. As soon as they prayed to God to deliver them, He began doing so.¹⁴⁴

INNER DIMENSIONS

[23] The king of Egypt "died." The Israelites groaned...and cried out. The pleas...rose up before God: Although the suffering was bitter, it did not become unbearable until Pharaoh "died." Until that point, the Jews sensed that by serving Pharaoh, they were extricating the sparks of holiness buried deep within his evil exterior. This made their suffering bearable, since it at least served some purpose.

Once they had extracted all the sparks of holiness within him, he "died"; his lifeline to holiness dis-

integrated and he was given over wholly to the powers of evil, death, and destruction. At this point, there was no longer any purpose in serving him, and the people felt the unmitigated suffering of the oppression. It was therefore specifically at this point that they cried out to God.

And once there was no more good to be extracted from Pharaoh, all that was left was to annihilate him, and therefore, once the people cried out to God, God called Moses to deliver the people and crush Pharaoh with the ten plagues.¹⁴⁵

144. Yom Tov Shel Rosh Hashanah 5766, pp. 60-61; Sefer HaMa'amarim Kuntresim, vol. 1, p. 64; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5689, p. 112.
 145. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5669, pp. 234-235.

19 They replied, “An Egyptian man rescued us from the hands of the shepherds. He also drew water for us, but only once; after that, the water ascended out of the well by itself until it had **watered all the sheep.”** Jether, having studied the traditions of the Jewish people in his search for religious truth, knew that water had ascended out of the well for Jacob and Rachel. He thus recognized Moses as one of their people, a monotheistic Israelite, who he could take for a son-in-law.

20 He therefore asked his daughters, “So where is he? Why did you leave the man there? Call him, and let him have something to eat,” meaning, “perhaps he will marry one of you” (just as Joseph euphemistically referred to Potiphar’s wife as “the bread he eats”¹³⁸).

21 Moses consented to stay with the man, but when Moses told Jether about his adventures in Ethiopia, he suspected him of lying, and imprisoned him. After ten years, when Moses was 77, Jether released him from prison and **gave Moses his daughter Zipporah as a wife.**¹³⁹ He made Moses tend his sheep and swear that he would not leave Midian without his permission.

22 When Zipporah gave birth to a son, Moses named him Gershom [*ger sham*—“a stranger there”], **“for,” he said, “I have been a stranger in an alien land.”**

The Fourth Phase of Slavery

23 It was during those many years in which Moses lived in Midian **that the king of Egypt** contracted leprosy (which is allegorically compared to death). Attempting to alleviate his suffering, he ordered his soldiers to slaughter Israelite children so he could bathe in their blood. Because of this, **the Israelites groaned because of the suffering they endured because of this program of treatment**¹⁴⁰ **and cried out. The pleas that sprang from this program rose up before God.**

24 God heard their anguished outcry, and God recalled His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.

25 God looked upon the Israelites, and God took note. Having decided that it was time for them to be redeemed, God had to select a redeemer. He appeared to Aaron and told him to prophesy to the Israelites, preparing them for redemption by saying, “Let everyone discard all the idols in his sight, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt, I am God, your God.”¹⁴¹ But Aaron was not successful in this mission; he could not convince the people to sever their ties with Egyptian culture.

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[19] He also drew water for us: As was explained above,¹⁴² Moses hailed from the world of *Tohu*, alluded to by water, and his mandate was to draw the *chesed* of *Tohu* into the *gevurah* of the present order of *Tikun*.¹⁴³

138. Genesis 39:6; Rashi *ad loc.* 139. Sources cited in *Seder HaDorot* 2386, 2387, 2435, 2444. 140. *Hitva'aduyot* 5748, vol. 2, pp. 218-219, 224-225. 141. Ezekiel 20:7; Rashi on 4:10. 142. On 2:10, above. 143. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5688, p. 156; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5682, p. 38.

— ONKELOS —

3:1 ומשה הוה רעי ית ענא דיתרו
חמודי רבא דמדין ודבר ית ענא
לאחר שפר רעיא למדברא ואתא
לסורא דאתגלי עלוהי יקרא דיי
לחורב: 2 ואתגלי מלאכא דיי
לה בשלהובית אשתא מגו אסנא
וחזא והא אסנא בעיר באשתא
ואסנא ליתוהי מתאכיל:

◆ רביעי 3:1 ומשה היה רעה את-צאן יתרו חתנו בהן
מדין וינהג את-הצאן אחר המדבר ויבא אל-ה'
האלהים חרבה: 2 וירא מלאך יהוה אליו בלבת-אש
מתוך הסנה וירא והנה הסנה בער באש והסנה איננו
אכל:

— RASHI —

בו: "מה אמלה לבתך" 55: מתוך הסנה. ולא אילן אחר,
משום: "עמו-אנכי בצרה" 56: אכל. נאכל, כמו: "לא-
עבר בך" 57, "אשר לקח משם" 58:

1 אחר המדבר. להתרחק מן הגל, שלא ירעו בשדות
אחרים: אל-הר האלהים. על שם העתיד: 2 בלבת-
אש. בשלהבת אש. לבו של אש, כמו: "לב השמים" 53,
"בלב האלה" 54. ואל תתמה על התי"ו, שיש לנו כיוצא

53. דברים ד, יא. 54. שמואל ב, יח. 55. יחזקאל טו, ל. 56. תהלים צא, טו. 57. דברים כא, ג. 58. בראשית ג, כג.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

tending God's flock is the best preparation for leader-
ship positions.¹⁴⁷

Another explanation why Moses worked as Jethro's
shepherd is that he chose to do so. Like the patri-
archs, Moses preferred this type of work because it af-
fords one the opportunity to meditate and commune
with God.

Solitude and meditation are prerequisites to intellec-
tual advance. Quiet, peaceful solitude allows the indi-
vidual to focus all his mental and emotional faculties
as well as all his senses on the subject he is seeking to
understand. Since Moses aspired to climb the ladder of
Divine knowledge as far as possible, he valued the
isolation that being a shepherd afforded him.¹⁴⁸

Moses ran after it: When Moses found the stray kid,
he did not get angry or punish it for leaving the fold.
He understood that it ran away because it was thirsty,
not because it wanted to rebel.

This is how we should treat our "flock," our children
and students. If they stray, it is because they are thirsty
for God but do not realize they can quench their thirst
with the waters of the Torah. The true leader realizes
the real reason his charges flee, and therefore chases
after them and brings them back to the fold.¹⁴⁹

**Moses was tending the sheep of Jethro, priest of
Midian. He guided the flock...to the mountain of
God:** The Torah reiterates that Jethro was the priest
of Midian in order to show us that Moses was able
to lead this priest's flock to the mountain of God; i.e.,
that he was able to rescue the Divine sparks in Jethro's

control from their idolatrous milieu and draw them
into God's fold.¹⁵⁰ In this way, he proved that he was
capable of doing the same for the Jewish people.¹⁵¹

2 The bush was not being consumed: Allegorically,
the lowly thorn bush signifies simple, sincere folk,
while learned, accomplished people are like the prodig-
ious fruit tree. Although the simple folk are inferior
in their accomplishments, their fiery yearning for God
is never consummated; in this sense, they are spiritu-
ally superior to those who are aware of their accom-
plishments but are therefore prone to complacency.

By appearing to Moses in a thorn bush, God indicated
to him that in order to be a true leader and redeem his
people, he would have to recognize the intrinsic value
of the simple folk. In order to receive the Torah, which
binds finite man to the infinite God, Moses would
have to appreciate and teach others to appreciate the
unrequited yearning for God that only simple folk
demonstrate so eloquently. Because God is infinite, no
matter how spiritually accomplished we may be, there
will always be uncharted realms for us to traverse in
our journey to Him. True appreciation for the infinity
of God and His Torah is therefore reflected in our ap-
preciation of the unquenchable thirst for God evinced
by unlettered folk and our desire to emulate it.

Moses understood this hint and applied it immedi-
ately to himself. Not satisfied with all his prior spiritual
accomplishments, he was willing to abandon all his
preconceived notions of reality in order to understand
the anomaly of the burning bush. He said, "let me turn
away from where I am in order to approach there." In

147. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 8, pp. 250-251. 148. *Likutei Diburim* 136ab, 138ab. 149. See *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, pp. 222 ff, as quoted in *MiMa'aynei HaChassidut*, vol. 2, p. 22. 150. *Yalkut Reuveini* on Genesis 31:9. 151. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 16-17.

Moses at the Burning Bush

- ◆ *Fourth Reading 3:1* So God examined the behavior of **Moses**, who was **tending the sheep of his father-in-law** Jethro, who would later be known as **Jethro, priest of Midian**, and concluded that he would be suitable. For example, a kid once ran away from the flock and reached a shady place near a pool of water where it stopped to drink. Moses ran after it and, when he caught up with it, said: “I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. You must be tired.” So he carried the kid back to the flock. God said: “Because you showed such mercy to a mortal man’s flock, you will tend My flock, Israel.”¹⁴⁶ Moses typically guided the flock far into the desert so that they would not graze in other people’s property, **and**, on one occasion, **came to Mount Sinai**, where **God** would eventually give the Torah; this mountain was also known as Mount **Horeb** (see Figure 3).

2 An angel of God appeared to him in the heart of a blazing fire from the midst of a thorn bush. By revealing Himself in a prickly thorn bush, God intimated to Moses that He felt the Israelites’ pain and suffering. **As Moses gazed, he saw that the bush was on fire, but the bush was not being consumed.**

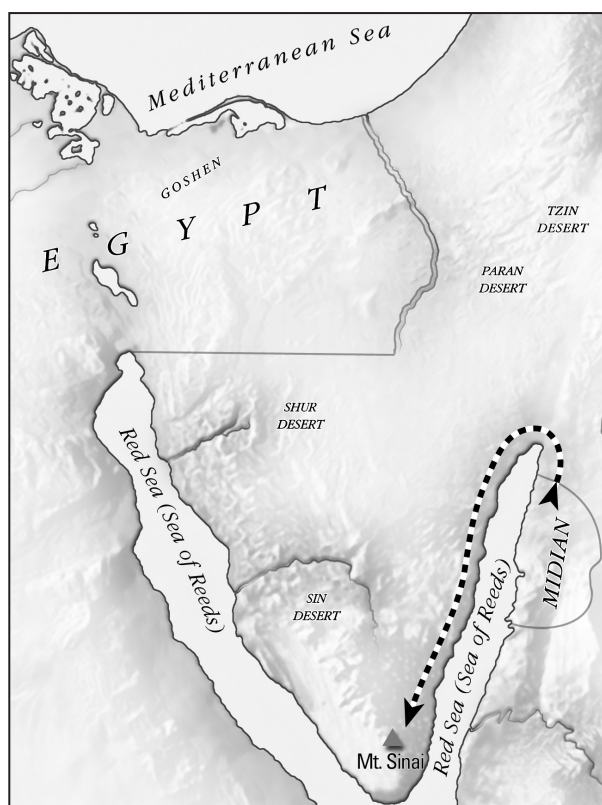


Figure 3: Moses at Mount Horeb

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

1 Moses was tending the sheep: Jethro was an intelligent person (having served as an advisor to Pharaoh and as the leader of Midian). He surely discerned Moses’ intelligence and knew about his aristocratic status, both as the son of Amram and as a prince in Pharaoh’s court. It seems strange, then, that he should put him to work as a shepherd.

One explanation is that Jethro sensed—consciously or unconsciously—that Moses was destined to lead

God’s flock and therefore—intentionally or unintentionally—employed him in a way that would foster his innate leadership traits in preparation for this.

A lesson we can learn from this is that even those of us who feel that their social stature and intellectual training qualify them for advanced educational positions or the like should not eschew teaching young children, God’s “flock.” We should rather overlook our qualifications, just as Moses did. On the contrary,

¹⁴⁶. *Shemot Rabbah* 2:2.

— ONKELOS —

3 ואמר משה אתפני כען ואחזי
ית חזונא רבא הדין מה דין לא
מתקד אסנא: 4 וחזא יי ארי
אתפני למחזי וקרא לה יי מגו
אסנא ואמר משה משה ואמר הא
אנא: 5 ואמר לא תקרב הלכא
שרי סינך מעל רגלך ארי אתרא
דאת קאים עלוהי אתר קדיש
הוא: 6 ואמר אנא אלקה דאבוך
אלקה דאברהם אלקה דיצחק
ואלקה דיעקב וכבשנן משה
לאפוהי ארי דחיל מלאסתבכלא
בצית יקרא די:

3 וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת־הַמַּרְאֶה הַנִּגְדָּל
הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יָבֵעַר הַסֵּנֶה: 4 וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹת
וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה
וַיֹּאמֶר הִנְנִי: 5 וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּקְרַב הָלֶם שְׁלִנְעֻלְיָךְ מֵעַל
רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמַּת־קֹדֶשׁ
הוּא: 6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי
יַעֲקֹב וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתַּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרָא מִהִבֵּית
אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים:

— RASHI —

3 אֶסְרֶה־נָּא. אֶסְרֶה מִכָּאן לְהִתְקַרֵּב שָׁם: 5 שֶׁל. שְׁלָךְ
וְהוֹצֵא, כְּמוֹ: "וְנָשַׁל הַבְּרָזִל" 59, "כִּי יִשַּׁל וַיִּתֶּךְ": 60. אֲדַמַּת־

59. דברים יט, ה. 60. דברים כח, מ.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

of materiality is to reject them altogether. This is the general reason behind all the prohibitions of the Torah. The Torah informs us which aspects of material reality can be elevated and which cannot.¹⁵⁹

5 Remove your shoes: Prior to this, Moses had reached the highest levels of Divine consciousness an individual can reach with his own intellect. God was now telling him that he could reach the next rung on the spiritual ladder only by "removing his shoes," i.e., removing his connection to the earth—divesting himself of the limitations of human logic and opening

himself up to Divine intellect. In this way, he would be prepared to tread on "holy ground."¹⁶⁰

6 The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God told Moses that, having reached the pinnacle of Divine consciousness attainable through isolation and meditation, it was now necessary to relate to God the way the forefathers did, namely, to bring Divine consciousness into the world. Moses resisted this calling, since his nature was predisposed to solitary self-introspection rather than teaching and leadership.¹⁶¹

INNER DIMENSIONS

[4] Moses, Moses: As mentioned above,¹⁶² Moses' soul descended into his physical body via the inner Divine energy of the spiritual worlds, and therefore his soul was not affected by its descent through these worlds. His Divine consciousness was not attenuated in order to conform to the intrinsic spirituality of each world. Thus, when he was born, Moses' soul possessed the same Divine consciousness it possessed in its origin.

In the text of the Torah, this fact is alluded to by the

lack of a cantillation mark indicating a pause (*pesik*) between the two instances of his name. This indicates that the first "Moses," Moses in his spiritual origin, is the same as the second "Moses," Moses in his physical body.

In contrast, when the Torah records how God called to Abraham and repeated his name, there is a pause, for as lofty as Abraham's soul was, it was affected by its descent through the spiritual worlds.¹⁶³

159. Or HaTorah, Shemot, pp. 66-67. 160. Likutei Diburim 138a ff. 161. Likutei Diburim 138a ff. 162. On 2:2. 163. Torah Or 76c; Or HaTorah, Shemot, pp. 59-60; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5630, pp. 56-57; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5702, p. 84.

3 Moses said, "Let me turn away from what I am doing here and go over there to behold this remarkable sight. Why doesn't the bush burn?"

4 When God saw that he had turned aside to look, He called to him from the midst of the bush, saying, "Moses, Moses!" He replied, "Here I am."

5 God said, "Come no nearer. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

6 After Moses did this, God said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." Moses hid his face, since he was afraid to look at God.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

response, "when God saw that he had turned aside to look, He called to him from the midst of the bush."¹⁵²

The aspiration implicit in "Let me turn away from where I am in order to approach there" is the foundation of any relationship with God. It is what makes us *human*, i.e., beings that aspire to ascend and transcend in both intellectual depth and spiritual self-refinement. It enables us to access our innate and infinite potentials. In particular, it expresses the ambition of the spiritual seeker who has chosen to climb the ladder of Divine consciousness by focusing his intellect in solitary meditation.

Such an individual lives in a process of unending ascent: whatever level of Divine consciousness he achieves, he always aspires to ascend further. The force of this aspiration unlocks all his human potentials, strengthening his intellect, emotions, and senses. He is constantly blessed with new insight and understanding, which in turn lead him on the dialectic path toward deeper and deeper knowledge.¹⁵³

By showing Moses the burning bush, God also revealed to him another aspect of the limitless nature of the Torah.

Moses knew that, spiritually, leaving the shackles of Egypt would mean transcending limited reality and connecting to the infinity of God. But he assumed that if someone would experience the infinite fire of Godly yearning he would be consumed by it, for an experience of such magnitude should logically be more than a finite being can bear. If he would not be consumed by it, it would be because he was so addicted to materiality that he was impervious to Divinity. He has succumbed to the fire of passion and lust for earthly indulgences and by rejecting God he would irrevocably

seal his fate and be similarly consumed. Establishing an unbounded relationship with God would therefore seem to lead to absurd consequences: the righteous would leave the world and the wicked would be locked into their wickedness.

God therefore showed Moses a bush *that burned but was not consumed*. The Torah he would receive and transmit to his people would enable the righteous to balance their burning ecstasy with devotion to God's purpose here on earth, and thus enable them to withstand the inertia driving them out of the body. It would also reveal the infinite, holy potential within even the most wicked of people, enabling them to refocus their lives at any time and transform their worldly fire into holy, Divine fire.¹⁵⁴

From another perspective, the lowly thorn bush symbolized the Jewish people as a whole. Their intrinsic humility qualifies them to be the chosen people, for "God is high, but He regards the lowly,"¹⁵⁵ and says, "I dwell among the crushed and lowly."¹⁵⁶ The fact that the bush was not consumed indicated that despite the burning travails of slavery, the people would survive intact, their innate love of God undiminished.¹⁵⁷

From yet another perspective, the harmful, annoying, and inedible thorns of the thorn bush symbolize evil. God thus taught Moses that He is present in everything, even evil; that evil has no independent existence without God.¹⁵⁸ This belief is essential in the struggle to overcome evil.

Nonetheless, **the bush was not being consumed**, because the thorn bush signified true evil, the lowest aspects of materiality, which cannot be elevated. The only way to overcome and rectify these lowest aspects

152. *Keter Shem Tov*, addendum 14; *Sefer HaSichot* 5702, pp. 46-47. 153. *Likutei Diburim* 138b-139a. 154. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5704, p. 112. 155. Psalms 138:6. 156. Isaiah 57:15. 157. *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, p. 68. 158. *Shemot Rabbah* 2:9; *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5704, p. 148.

ONKELOS

7 ואמר יי מגל לא גלי קדמי ית
שעבוד עמי די במצרים וית
קבילתהון שמייע קדמי מן קדם
מפלגתהון ארי גלי קדמי ית
בייהון: 8 ואתגליתי לשונותהון
מידא דמצראי ולאסקותהון מן
ארעא הדיא לארע טבא ופתיא
לארע עבדא חלב ודבש לאתר
בנענאי וחתאי ואמונאי ופרזאי
וחנאי ויבוסאי: 9 וכען הא קבילת
בני ישראל עלת לקדמי ואף גלי
קדמי ית דוחקא די מצראי דחקין
להון: 10 וכען איתא ואשלחך
לות פרעה ואפיק ית עמי בני
ישראל ממצרים: 11 ואמר משה
קדם יי מאן אנא ארי איזיל לות
פרעה וארי אפיק ית בני ישראל
ממצרים: 12 ואמר ארי יהי
מימרי בסעדר ודין לך אתא ארי
אנא שלחך באפקותך ית עמא
ממצרים תפלחון קדם יי על טורא
הדין: 13 ואמר משה קדם יי הא
אנא אתי לות בני ישראל ואימר
להון אלהא דאבהתכון שלחני
לותכון ויימרון לי מה שמה מה
אימר להון:

7 ויאמר יהוה ראה ראיתי את-עני עמי אשר במצרים
ואת-צעקתם שמעתי מפני נגשיו כי ידעתי את-
מכאביו: 8 וארד להצילו | מיד מצרים ולהעלותו
מן-הארץ ההוא אל-ארץ טובה ורחבה אל-ארץ
זבת חלב ודבש אל-מקום הפנעני והחתי והאמרי
והפרזי והחוי והיבوسی: 9 ועתה הנה צעקת בני-
ישראל באה אלי וגם-ראיתי את-הלחץ אשר
מצרים לחצים אתם: 10 ועתה לכה ואשלחך
אל-פרעה והוצא את-עמי בני-ישראל ממצרים:
11 ויאמר משה אליהם מי אנכי כי אלך אל-
פרעה וכי אוציא את-בני ישראל ממצרים: 12 ויאמר
בי-איהי עמך וזה-לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך
בהוציאתך את-העם ממצרים תעבדון את-האלהים
על החר הזה: 13 ויאמר משה אליהם
הנה אנכי בא אל-בני ישראל ואמרתי להם אלהי
אבותיכם שלחני אליכם ואמרו לי מה-שמו מה
אמר אלהם:

RASHI

להציל, כאשר ראית הסנה עושה שליחותי ואיננו
אכל — כך תלך בשליחותי ואינך נזוק, וששאלת: מה-
זכות יש לישראל שיצאו ממצרים? דבר גדול יש לי
על הוצאה זו, שהרי עתידים לקבל התורה על החר
הזה לסוף שלשה חדשים שיצאו ממצרים. דבר אחר:
"כי אהיה עמך", "וזה" — שתצליח בשליחותך — "לך
האות" על הבטחה אחרת שאני מבטיחך, שכשתוציאם
ממצרים תעבדון אותי על החר הזה, שתקבלו התורה
עליה, והיא הזכות העומדת לישראל. ודגמת לשון
זה מצינו: "וזה-לך האות, אכול השנה ספית וגו'"⁶²
— מפלת סנהריב תהיה לך אות על הבטחה אחרת,
שאצרכם חריבה מפרות, ואני אברך הספיחים:

7 כי ידעתי את-מכאביו. כמו: "וידע אלהים"⁶¹. כלומר,
כי שמתי לב להתבונן ולדעת את מכאוביו, ולא העלמתי
עיני ולא אצטום את אזני מצעקתם: 10 ועתה לכה
ואשלחך אל-פרעה. ואם תאמר: מה-תועילך — "והוצא
את-עמי" — יועילו דבריך ותוציאם משם: 11 מי אנכי.
מה-אני חשוב לדבר עם המלכים: וכי אוציא את-בני
ישראל. ואף אם חשוב אני, מה-זכו ישראל שיעשה
להם נס ואוציאם ממצרים: 12 ויאמר בי-איהי עמך.
השיבו על ראשון ראשון ועל אחרון אחרון, שאמרתי:
"מי אנכי כי אלך אל-פרעה? לא שלך היא כי אם
משלי, "בי-איהי עמך". "וזה" — המראה אשר ראית
בסנה — "לך האות כי אנכי שלחתיך". וכדאי אני

61. שמות ב, כח. 62. ישעיה לו, ל.

7 God said, "I have indeed seen the plight of My people in Egypt. I have heard their outcry caused by their taskmasters, for I am aware of their pains.

8 I have come down to rescue them from the hands of the Egyptians, and to take them up from that land to a good and ample land, to a land flowing with goats' milk and date- and fig-honey,¹⁶⁴ the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Even though I also promised the territory of the Amonites, Moabites, and Edomites to Abraham,¹⁶⁵ you will not inherit these at this time."¹⁶⁶ God did not mention the Girgashites¹⁶⁷ in this context because their territory was not distinguished as "flowing with milk and honey."¹⁶⁸

9 "And now, the outcry of the Israelites has indeed reached Me, and I have also seen the oppression to which the Egyptians are subjecting them.

10 Therefore, now go. I shall send you to Pharaoh to convince him to release the people, and your words will be effective. You shall take My people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."

11 Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh? I am just a shepherd now, and I do not possess the social status to address a king. And moreover, by what merit of theirs can I take the Israelites out of Egypt? This would require a miracle, and in my perception they are not worthy of such a miracle. I have seen that they are quarrelsome and willing to slander each other."¹⁶⁹

12 God replied, "Do not worry about your status, for I will be with you, and you will be speaking on My authority, not your own. You have seen here that the bush performs My mission and is not consumed; this is your sign that you, too, will not be harmed in the mission that I have sent you. As for your second question, the people are indeed worthy of a miracle, for when you take the people out of Egypt, you will be doing so in order that they all serve God by receiving My Torah on this mountain. It is therefore worth it for Me to perform miracles on their behalf, even if they do not deserve it themselves."

13 Moses said to God, "I am going to come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your forefathers has sent me to you.' When they hear this, they will ask me, 'What is His Name?' meaning, 'What kind of God is it that allows the children of these forefathers—whom He loved so dearly—to suffer in such a terrible exile for so long? Why does He remember us only now that we have suffered so much and thousands upon thousands of our children have been slaughtered?'" When they ask me this, what shall I tell them?"

164. Rashi on 13:5, below. 165. Genesis 15:18-21. 166. *Hitva'aduyot* 5745, vol. 2, pp. 1258-1259, 1267-1269. 167. Genesis 15:21. 168. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, pp. 224-25; Nachmanides on this verse. 169. See above, 2:14.

— ONKELOS —

14 ואמר יי למשה אהיה אשר
אהיה ואמר כדן תימר לבני
ישראל אהיה שלחני לותכון:
15 ואמר עוד יי למשה כדן תימר
לבני ישראל יי אלהא דאבהתכון
אלהא דאברהם אלהא דיצחק
ואלהא דיעקב שלחני לותכון דין
שמי לעלם ודין דוכרני לכל-דר
ודר: 16 אזיל ותיכנוש ית סבי
ישראל ותימר להון יי אלהא
דאבהתכון אתגלי לי אלהא
דאברהם יצחק ויעקב למימר
מדבר דכירנא יתכון וית דאתעבד
לכון במצרים:

14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר
וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶהְיֶה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם:
15 וַיֹּאמֶר עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי
יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְהִשְׁמִי לְעַלְמָם וְזֶה
זְכָרִי לְדֹר דֹּר:

◆ חמישי 16 לך ואספת את-זקני ישראל ואמרת אליהם
יהוה אלהי אבותיכם נראה אלי אלהי אברהם
יצחק ויעקב לאמר פקד פקדתי אתכם ואת-העשוי
לכם במצרים:

— RASHI —

וזה זכרי. למדו היאך נקרא. וכן דוד הוא אומר:
"ה' שמך לעולם, ה' זכרך לדור-ודור".¹⁷⁷ 16 את-זקני
ישראל. מייחדים לישיבה. ואם תאמר: זקנים סתם,
היאך אפשר לו לאסוף זקנים של ששים רבוא:

14 אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה. "אֶהְיֶה" עִמָּם בְּצֶרֶה זֶה, "אֲשֶׁר
אֶהְיֶה" עִמָּם בְּשִׁעְבֹּד שְׁאֵר מַלְכוּת. אָמַר לְפָנָיו: רְבוּנוּ
שֶׁל עוֹלָם, מָה אֲנִי מוֹפִיר לָהֶם צָרָה אַחֲרֵת, דִּים בְּצָרָה
זוֹ. אָמַר לוֹ: יִפֹּה אֲמִרָת. "כֹּה תֹאמַר" וְגו': 15 זֶה־שְׁמִי
לְעַלְמָם. חֶסֶד וְיִי, לֹמַר: הֶעֱלִימָהוּ שְׁלֹא יִקְרָא כְּכַתְּבוּ:

177. תהלים קלה, יג.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

reasons for allowing us to suffer and seeing our condition in the full context of His omniscience. If we acknowledge this, we can then turn to Him and ask Him to nonetheless behave toward us with *revealed*, self-evident mercy.

In the messianic future, when God's mercy will indeed be fully revealed on earth, we will no longer need to acknowledge that God's mercy is operative even if we cannot perceive it. We will pronounce His proper Name, the mercy-Name, as it is written.¹⁷⁷

This is My Name to be concealed; this is how I am to be recalled for all generations: On a deeper level, God told Moses here that it is possible to refine and elevate the world, that the world is not just something to be shunned in order to focus on philosophical and spiritual pursuits. When God informed Moses that through the Torah and its commandments it would be possible to raise the Divine consciousness of the

world, He won him over, and Moses agreed in principle to forgo his isolation and to redeem the Jews.¹⁷⁸

16 Say to them: Even though the Jews had sunk to a precariously low spiritual state—and were even serving idols—God did not tell Moses to rebuke them for this or warn them that if they do not mend their ways their exile will continue or get worse. Rather, God instructed him to remind them of the merit of their forbearers and announce that in this merit and in the merit of their suffering they were about to be redeemed. Only much later—when he had an alternative for them, a commandment for them to fulfill—did Moses tell them to stop serving idols.¹⁷⁹

Similarly, we see nowadays as well that the most effective way to draw the hearts of our fellow Jews closer to God is by first showing them the beauty of their heritage and uplifting them with the promise of the redemption.¹⁸⁰

177. *Pesachim* 50a; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, pp. 19-25. 178. *Likutei Diburim* 139a. 179. Below, 12:21 and commentary *ad loc.*
180. *Sefer HaSichot* 5751, vol. 1, pp. 250, 252.

14 God said to Moses, “Tell them that **I** was and **shall** continue to **be** with them in this exile, **just as I shall be** with them in their later exiles. I do not ignore them during their exiles, but in fact, I feel their suffering and suffer with them.” Moses said, “It is enough that they have to suffer their present exile; why should I mention their future exiles?” God **then said**, “This is exactly what I meant.¹⁷⁰ Although I am telling *you* that I will suffer with them in their future exiles, **you shall say to the Israelites** only that ‘The God who says “**I shall be** with them in this exile” **sent me to you.**’”¹⁷¹

15 God further said to Moses, “And if they ask, ‘If God feels our suffering, why did He allow it to continue?’ **So shall you say to the Israelites: ‘God, the God of mercy, the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.** The exile and all its suffering was in fact an act of My mercy. The fact that this was not apparent was simply because My attribute of mercy, although operative, is hidden in exile, and indeed, in this world in general. Therefore, although “God”—indicating My attribute of mercy—is My proper **Name at all times**, its pronunciation is **to be concealed**¹⁷² from the general populace until the final Redemption. Nonetheless, even now, it *is* possible to call forth My mercy from its concealment, but not directly (by pronouncing the mercy-Name as it is written). Instead, **this is how I am to be recalled for all generations** until the final Redemption: they should substitute¹⁷³ the Name *A-d-n-y* [“my Lord”¹⁷⁴] for My proper Name. They can elicit My mercy by pronouncing the mercy-Name as if it were the Name of lordship, acknowledging that I run the world and have My own, sometimes inscrutable reasons for running the world the way I choose.”¹⁷⁵

- ◆ **Fifth Reading 16 “Go and assemble the elders, i.e., the leaders, of Israel and say to them, ‘God, the God of your forefathers—the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—appeared to me and said, “I have indeed remembered you and what is being done to you in Egypt.”’**

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

15 This is how I am to be recalled for all generations: In other words, we can elicit God’s revealed mercy if we ask for it while fully cognizant of the fact that

He is already acting mercifully with us but our limited perspective does not allow us to recognize this. We accept Him as our *Lord*, as having His inscrutable

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[14] I shall be as I shall be: The numerical value of the word for “I shall be” (אֶהְיֶה) is 21. “I shall be as I shall be” implies multiplying the two words, giving $21 \times 21 = 441$, the numerical value of the

word for “truth” (אֱמֶת). In these words, God was giving Moses the power to reveal the difficult but deep truth about God’s providence and care during exile.¹⁷⁶

170. *Chidushei Agadot, Berachot* 9b. 171. Rashi does not take the word *Ehyeh* in this verse to itself be a Name of God (*Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, p. 22). 172. The word for “forever” (לְעֹלָם) is written such that it may be read, “to conceal” (לְעִלְמִים). 173. The word for “how I am to be recalled” (וְכִי) may also mean “how I am to be mentioned.” 174. See Introduction. 175. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 26, pp. 19-25. 176. *Sefer HaSichot* 5697, p. 229.

ONKELOS

17 ואמר אלה אתכם מעני מצרים אל-ארץ
הבנעני והחתי והאמורי והפרזי והחוי והיבوسی אל-
ארץ זבת חלב ודבש: 18 ושמעו לקלך ובאת
אתה וזקני ישראל אל-מלך מצרים ואמרתם אליו
יהוה אלהי העבריים נקרה עלינו ועתה נלכה-נא
דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונזבחה ליהוה אלהינו:
19 ואני ידעתי כי לא-יתן אתכם מלך מצרים
להלך ולא ביד חזקה: 20 ושלחתי את-ידי והביתי
את-מצרים בכל נפלאתי אשר אעשה בקרב
ואחרי-כן ישלח אתכם: 21 ונתתי את-חן העם-
הזה בעיני מצרים והיה כי תלכו לא תלכו ריקם:
22 ושאלה אשה משכנתה ומגרת ביתה בלי-כסף
וכלי זהב ושמלת ושמתם על-בניכם ועל-בנותיכם
ונצלתם את-מצרים:

RASHI

את-עדים⁷¹, והנו"ן בו יסוד. ומנחם חפרו במחברת
צד"י, עמ': ויצא אלהים את-מקנה אביכם⁷², "אשר
הציל אלהים מאבינו"⁷³. ולא יאמנו דבריו, כי אם
לא היתה הנו"ן יסוד והיא נקודה בחירק, לא תהא
משמשת בלשון "ופעלתם", אלא בלשון "ונפעלתם",
כמו: "ונסחתם מעל האדמה"⁷⁴, "ונתתם ביד-אויב"⁷⁵,
"ונגפתם לפני אויביכם"⁷⁶, "ונתבתם בתוכה"⁷⁷,
"ואמרתם נצלנו"⁷⁸ — לשון נפעלנו. וכל-נו"ן שהיא
באה בתיבה לפרקים ונופלת ממנה, כנו"ן של "נוגף"
"נושא" "נותן" "נושף", כשהיא מדברת לשון "ופעלתם"
— תנוד בשיב"א בחטף, כגון: "ונשאתם את-אביכם"⁷⁹,
"ונתתם להם את-ארץ הגלעד"⁸⁰, "ונמלתם את בשר
ערלתכם"⁸¹. לכן אני אומר, שזאת הנקודה בחירק, מן
היסוד היא, ויסוד שם דבר "נצל". והוא מן הלשונות
הכבדים, כמו: "דבור" "כפור" "למוד", כשידבר בלשון
"ופעלתם" ינקד בחירק, כמו: "ודברתם אל-הסלע"⁸²,
"וכפרתם את-הבית"⁸³, "ולמדתם אתם את-בניכם"⁸⁴.

18 ושמעו לקלך. מאליהם, מבין שתאמר להם לשון
זה ושמעו לקלך, שכתב סימן זה מסור בידם מעקב
ומיוסף, שבלשון זה הם נגאלים — יעקב אמר להם:
"ואלהים פקד ופקד אתכם"⁶⁴. יוסף אמר להם: "פקד
יפקד אלהים אתכם"⁶⁵: **אלהי העבריים**. יו"ד ויתרה,
רמז לעשר מכות: **נקרה עלינו**. לשון מקרה. וכן "ויקר
אלהים"⁶⁶, "ואנכי אקרה כה"⁶⁷ — אהא נקרה מאתו
הלום: 19 לא-יתן אתכם מלך מצרים להלך. אם אין
אני מראה לו ידי החזקה. כלומר, כל-עוד שאין אני
מודיעו ידי החזקה, לא-יתן אתכם להלך: לא-יתן. לא
ישבך, כמו: "על-כן לא-נתתיר"⁶⁸. "ולא-נתנו אלהים
להרע עמדי"⁶⁹. וכלן לשון נתינה הם. ויש מפרשים:
"ולא ביד חזקה" — ולא בשביל שידו חזקה, כי מאז
אשלח את ידי והביתי את מצרים וגו'. ומתרגמין
אותו: "ולא מן קדם דחילה תקיף". משמו של רבי
יעקב ברבי מנחם נאמר לי: 22 ומגרת ביתה. מאותה
שהיא גרה אתה בבית: **ונצלתם**. בתרגומו: "ותרוקנו".
וכן: "וינצלו את-מצרים"⁷⁰, "וינתצלו בני-ישראל

64. בראשית נ, כד. שם, כה. 65. במדבר כג, ד. שם, טו. 66. בראשית כ, ו. 67. שם לא, ז. 70. שמות יב, לו. 71. שם לו, ו. 72. בראשית לא, ט. 73. שם, טו. 74. דברים כח, טג. 75. ויקרא כו, כה. 76. שם, יז. 77. יחזקאל כב, כא. 78. ירמיה ז, י. 79. בראשית מה, יט. 80. במדבר לב, כט. 81. בראשית יז, יא. 82. במדבר כ, ח. 83. יחזקאל מה, כ. 84. דברים יא, יט.

17 I have declared that I will bring you up from the affliction of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizites, the Hivites, and Jebusites, to a land flowing with goats' milk and date- and fig-honey." As above,¹⁸¹ God did not mention the Gergashites here because their territory was not distinguished as "flowing with milk and honey."

18 "They will heed your voice, because it has been passed down to them from their forebearers that their redemption will be announced to them with the words 'I have indeed remembered you.' Jacob said, 'God will indeed remember you,'¹⁸² and Joseph said, 'God will indeed remember you.'¹⁸³ **You and the elders of Israel shall then go to the king of Egypt and say to him, 'God, the God of the Hebrews, appeared to us. So allow us now to make a three-day journey into the wilderness so that we may sacrifice to God, our God.'**

19 But I know that the king of Egypt will not allow you to go until I exercise My strong hand and perform miracles.

20 So I will stretch forth My hand and strike Egypt with all My wondrous deeds that I will perform in its midst, and then he will send you out. It is not because of his own might that he will refuse to let you go, because as soon as I perform the miracles I intend to, he will perforce let you go.

21 I will make this people favorable in the eyes of the Egyptians, so that when you leave, you will not go empty-handed.

22 Every woman shall request objects of silver and gold, and—most importantly for the journey, both for protection from the elements and because it wears out quickly on a journey^{183a}—clothing, from her neighbor and from the woman in whose house she lodges. You shall place these on your sons and on your daughters, and you will thus empty out Egypt. In this way, I will fulfill My promise to Abraham: 'and afterwards they will go out with great wealth.'¹⁸⁴

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

17 From the affliction of Egypt...to a land flowing with milk and honey: Allegorically, milk and honey indicate pleasure and delight in a person's relationship with God.

When we are afflicted or confined, our frustration prevents us from functioning at full capacity; when we enjoy full freedom of expression, we put to use the full gamut of our abilities. Similarly, when we are in spiritual "exile," i.e., deprived of the full use of our expressive capacities in our relationship with God (either by outside forces or by our own devotion to materialism), we have to fall back on simple faith and self-discipline to continue fulfilling our Divine mission. We may indeed accomplish things, and even reveal our innermost devotion to God in the course of doing so. But the scope of our relationship will remain limited and stunted.

When, however, we can serve God out of boundless love for Him, "a love of delights,"¹⁸⁵ we can access our full complement of abilities, blending and developing them to express the Divine within us. When our relationship with God is thus allowed to blossom and grow, it eventually summons the innermost longings of our heart.

Thus, God describes the type of relationship ("land") He seeks to bring his people to as "good and ample"¹⁸⁶ and "flowing with milk and honey."¹⁸⁷

22 You will thus empty out Egypt: It was not in order to punish the Egyptians for maltreating the Jews that God allowed them to impoverish Egypt when they left, for then it would not have been necessary for the Egyptians to esteem the Jews as they "lent" them their possessions. (The Jews could have simply taken what they needed, say, during the three days of dark-

181. 3:8. 182. Genesis 50:24; see *Shemot Rabbah* 5:16. 183. Genesis 50:25. **183a. *Shemot Rabbah* 3:11; *Bereishit Rabbah* 60:11.** 184. Genesis 15:14. 185. Song of Songs 7:7. 186. Above, verse 9. 187. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5686, pp. 246, 256.

— ONKELOS —

4:1 וְאֶתֵּיב מֹשֶׁה וְאָמַר וְהָא לֹא יִהְיֶמְנוּ לִי וְלֹא יִקְבְּלוּן מִנִּי אֲרִי יִמְרוּן לֹא אֲתִגְלִי לָךְ יי: 2 וְאָמַר לֹא יי מַה־דִּין בִּידְךָ וְאָמַר חוּטְרָא: 3 וְאָמַר רַמְיָהי לֹא־רַעָא וְרַמְיָהי לֹא־רַעָא וְהָיָה לְחוּטָא וְעֵרַק מֹשֶׁה מִן קַדְמוּהִי: 4 וְאָמַר יי לְמֹשֶׁה אוֹשִׁיט יָדְךָ וְאַחֲזֹד בְּזַנְבָּהּ וְאוֹשִׁיט יָדָהּ וְאֶתְקִיף בָּהּ וְהָיָה לְחוּטְרָא בִּידָהּ: 5 בְּדִיל דִּיהִימְנוּן אֲרִי אֲתִגְלִי לָךְ יי אֱלֹהֵא דִּאֲבַהֲתַהוּן אֱלֹהֵא דִּאֲבַרְהֵם אֱלֹהֵא דִּי־צִחֻק וְאֱלֹהֵא דִּי־עֵקֶב:

4:1 וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא־יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ בְּקִלִּי כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה: 2 וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו יְהוָה מִזֶּה {מַה־זֶּה} בִּידְךָ וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה: 3 וַיֹּאמֶר הִשְׁלִיכֵהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיִּשְׁלַכְהוּ אֶרְצָה וַיְהִי לְנַחֲשׁ וַיֵּנֶם מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵיו: 4 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה שְׁלַח יָדְךָ וְאַחֲזֵ בְזַנְבוֹ וַיִּשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וַיַּחֲזִקֻבּוּ וַיְהִי לְמִטָּה בְּכַפּוֹ: 5 לְמַעַן יֵאֱמִינוּ כִּי־נִרְאָה אֵלֶיךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתָם אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב:

— RASHI —

”לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי”, וְתַפֵּשׁ אֲמָנוּתוֹ שֶׁל נָחֶשׁ: 4 וַיַּחֲזִקֻבּוּ. לְשׁוֹן אֲחִיזָה הוּא. וְהִרְבֵּה יֵשׁ בְּמִקְרָא: ”וַיַּחֲזִיקוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים בִּידֵיהֶם”,⁸⁵ ”וַיַּחֲזִיקוּהָ בְּמִבְשָׁיו־הָ”,⁸⁶ ”וַיַּחֲזִיקוּתִי בְּזַנְבוֹ”,⁸⁷ כָּל־לְשׁוֹן חוּזֵק הַדְּבֹק לְבִי”ת, לְשׁוֹן אֲחִיזָה הוּא:

2 מִזֶּה בִּידְךָ. לְכָף נִתְּבַת תְּבָה אֶחָת, לְדָרוֹשׁ: מִזֶּה שְׂבִיבָךְ אֶתָּה חֵיב לְלִקּוֹת, שְׂחֻשְׁדָּת בְּכַשְׂרִים. וּפְשׁוּטוֹ, בְּאֲדָם שְׂאוֹמֵר לְחֻבְרוֹ: מוֹדָה אֶתָּה שׁוֹז שְׁלִפְנִיךָ, אָבֶן הִיא! אָמַר לוֹ: הֵן! אָמַר לוֹ: הִרְנִי עוֹשֶׂה אוֹתָהּ עַץ: 3 וַיְהִי לְנַחֲשׁ. רָמַז לוֹ שֶׁסֵּפֶר לְשׁוֹן הָרַע עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאוֹמְרוֹ:

85. בראשית יט, טו. 86. דברים כה, יא. 87. שמואלא י, לה.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Moses knew that 210 years of exile had taken their toll: the people had learned to take slavery as a given and had sunk to an extremely low level of Divine consciousness (and even practiced idolatry). He therefore assumed that even though they did believe that God would one day redeem them, it would be hard for them to *really* believe that it was about to happen. He therefore asked God for an additional, concrete sign.¹⁹³

2 What is that in your hand: God hinted to Moses that he deserved to be hit with the staff he held even though, as we said, he did not *intend* to speak disparagingly of them, and certainly did not do so in their presence.

The Torah does not speak disparagingly of anyone unless there is a reason to do so.¹⁹⁴ It points out Moses' error in order to teach us how severe an offense it is to speak disparagingly of the Jewish people and how it is possible to make amends for doing so.

If this was true in Moses' time, it is certainly true now-

adays. When the Torah was given, the Jewish people became “a treasured people,”¹⁹⁵ “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”¹⁹⁶ Since then, the Jewish people have sanctified God's name countless times and have been purified by their exiles. Therefore, if a Jew is lacking in his observance of the Torah, it cannot be because there is anything wrong with him; it can only be because his evil inclination has temporarily gotten the better of him or because he was not raised in an environment that fostered a positive regard for religion. For all these reasons, all Jews are of inestimable worth and it is altogether out of order to speak disparagingly of any of them.¹⁹⁷

4 And grasp its tail: God here showed Moses how to rectify the sin of slander. The tail, the hindmost part of the animal, indicates lowliness and humility. By humbling our ego, we eliminate the haughtiness that makes us see others' faults. Cleansed of its negativity, the staff turned back into a staff, and in fact became “the staff of God”¹⁹⁸ that Moses used later to perform miracles.¹⁹⁹

193. *Sefer HaSichot* 5751, vol. 1, pp. 247, 250-251. 194. *Bava Batra* 123a; see also *Pesachim* 3a. 195. Below, 19:5. 196. Below, 19:6. 197. *Sefer HaSichot* 5751, vol. 1, pp. 250-251. 198. Below, 4:17, 20. 199. *Sefer HaSichot* 5751, vol. 1, pp. 250-251.

4:1 Moses replied, saying, “But they will not believe me nor listen to my voice, for they will say, ‘God did not appear to you.’”

2 Moses had a staff made out of sapphire¹⁸⁸ in his hand. **God said to him, “What is that in your hand? You deserve to be hit with that which is in your hand”¹⁸⁹ because you spoke disparagingly against the people.”** Moses answered, **“A staff.”**

3 God said, **“Throw it on the ground.”** Moses **threw it on the ground and it turned into a snake, and Moses fled from it.** God turned it into a snake in order to show Moses that he had slandered the Jewish people, just as the primordial snake had spoken ill of God, calling Him jealous.¹⁹⁰

4 God said to Moses, **“Reach out and grasp its tail.”** When he reached out and took hold of the snake, **it turned into a staff in his hand.**

5 God said: **“This is so that they will believe that God—the God of their forefathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—appeared to you.”**

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

ness.) Rather, in order to fulfill His promise to Abraham, God had to make sure the Jews would feel that they were receiving their just reward, their “salary” for having worked so long and hard for Egypt. They therefore had to receive their pay with their former oppressors’ full consent and goodwill.

Allegorically, the “great wealth” the Jews took with them when they left Egypt was the power of holiness that the Egyptians had misused and thereby embedded within depraved Egyptian civilization.¹⁹¹ In this context, this verse may be read:

Every woman: i.e., every Jew (God’s mate), during the course of his or her stay on earth—

shall ‘borrow’ objects of silver and gold: is intended to accrue higher levels of love (silver) and fear (gold) of God—

as well as clothing: and express these in thought, word, and deed (the garments of the soul)—

from her neighbor: by extracting the holiness both from those aspects of reality with which he or she comes into occasional contact—

and from the woman in whose house she lodges: as well as from those parts of the world with which he or she comes in constant contact.

Just as taking physical treasures with them did not serve to punish the Egyptians but rather to reward the

Jews for their labor, taking the spiritual treasures with them was not merely in order to liberate these treasures but mainly in order to bring the Jews themselves to a higher level of Divine consciousness.

Similarly, although every Jewish soul descends into this world (its existential exile) in order to elevate the sparks of holiness it contacts here and thereby make this world a home for God, God’s main intent is that the soul itself become more of a home for God—i.e., be brought to a higher level of Divine consciousness—through its efforts.

If we are cognizant of this, we will not be content with fulfilling our Divine mission in this world with no more inspiration than the obedience of a devoted servant. Rather, we will approach our task with the enthusiasm that comes with full awareness of its purpose: that we—together with the part of the world we can influence—achieve a higher consciousness of God through our efforts. Moreover, if we go further and truly internalize this perspective, we will adopt God’s purpose as our own, and thereby fulfill our mission with consummate enthusiasm and mindfulness.¹⁹²

1 But they will not believe me: But God had told Moses explicitly that the people *would* hearken to him because he was going to give them a sign—the expression Joseph had told them would announce their redemption! Why did Moses not believe God and ask for an additional sign to give the people?

¹⁸⁸. Rashi on 17:6, below. ¹⁸⁹. The words for “What is that?” are combined into one word, which can be read, “from that.”

¹⁹⁰. See commentary to Genesis 3:5. ¹⁹¹. *Likutei Torah (Arizal)*, *Teitzei*; *Torah Or* 56d, 60c; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 823 ff.

¹⁹². *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 21, pp. 15 ff, vol. 3, p. 826.

— ONKELOS —

6 ואמר יי לה עוד אעיל בען
ידך בעטפה ואעיל ידה בעטפה
ואפקה והא חורא בתלגא:
7 ואמר אתיב ידך לעטפה ואתיב
ידך לעטפה ואפקה מעטפה והא
תבת הות כבשרה: 8 ויהי אם
לא יהימנו לך ולא יקבלו לקל
אתא קדמא ויהימנו לקל אתא
בתרא: 9 ויהי אם לא יהימנו אף
לתרין אתיא האליו ולא יקבלו
מך ותסב ממאי דבנורא ותשוד
ליבשתא ויהו מיא די תסב מן
נהרא ויהו לדמא בבישתא:
10 ואמר משה קדם יי בבעו יי לא
גבר דמלול אנא אף מאתמלי אף
מדקדמוהי אף מעדן דמלילתא
עם עבדך ארי יקיר ממלל ועמיק
לשן אנא:

6 ויאמר יהוה לו עוד הבאנא ידך בחיקך ויבא ידו
בחיכו ויוצאה והנה ידו מצרעת בשלג: 7 ויאמר השב
ידך אל-חיקך וישב ידו אל-חיכו ויוצאה מחיכו והנה
שבה בבשרו: 8 והיה אם-לא יאמינו לך ולא ישמעו
לקל האת הראשון והאמינו לקל האת האחרון:
9 והיה אם-לא יאמינו גם לשני האתות האלה ולא
ישמעו לקלך ולקחת ממימי היאר ושפכת היבשה
והיו המים אשר תקח מן-היאר והיו לדם ביבשת:
10 ויאמר משה אל-יהוה בי אדני לא איש דברים
אנכי גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מאז דברך אל-עבדך
כי כבד-פה וכבד לשון אנכי:

— RASHI —

נהפכים לדם, ואף כשירדו לארץ יהיו בהיותן. אבל
עכשו מלמדנו, שלא יהיו דם עד שיהיו ביבשת: 10
גם מתמול וגו'. למדנו, שכל-שבעה ימים היה הקב"ה
מפתה את-משה בסנה לילך בשליחותו: "מתמול"
"שלשום" "מאז דברך" — הרי שלשה. ושלשה "גמין"
רביין הם, הרי ששה. והוא היה עומד ביום השביעי
כשאמר לו זאת עוד: "שלחנא ביד-תשלח"⁸⁸, עד
שחרה בו וקבל עליו. וכל-זה, שלא היה רוצה לטל
גדלה על אהרן אחיו, שהיה גדול הימנו, ונביא
היה, שנאמר: "הנגלה נגליתי אל-בית אביך בהיותם
במצרים"⁸⁹ — הוא אהרן. וכן ביחזקאל: "ואנדע להם
בארץ מצרים וגו' ואמר אליהם איש שקוצי עיניו
השליכו"⁹⁰. ואותה נבואה לאהרן נאמרה: כבד-פה.
בכבודות אני מדבר. ובלשון לעז בלב-וי:⁹¹

6 מצרעת בשלג. דרך צרעת להיות לבנה — "ואם"
בהרת לבנה היא"⁸⁸, אף באות זה רמז לו שלשון הרע
ספר, באורו: "לא יאמינו לי", לפיכך הלקהו בצרעת,
כמו שלקתה מרים על לשון הרע: 7 ויוצאה מחיכו
והנה שבה בבשרו. מכאן שמדה טובה ממדת לבא
ממדת פרענות, שהרי בראשונה לא נאמר 'מחיכו':
8 והאמינו לקל האת האחרון. משתאמר להם:
בשבילכם לקיתי על שספרתי עליכם לשון הרע,
יאמינו לך, שכבר למדו בכך שהמודוין להרע להם
— לזקים בנגעים, כגון פרעה ואבימלך בשביל שרה: 9
ולקחת ממימי היאר. רמז להם, שבמכה ראשונה
נפרע מאלהותם: והיו המים וגו'. "והיו" "והיו" שמי
פעמים. נראה בעיני, אלו נאמר "והיו המים אשר
תקח מן-היאר לדם ביבשת" — שומע אני שבידו הם

88. ויקרא יג, ד. 89. לחל פסוק יג. 90. שמואל ב, כז. 91. חז, כ. 92. עלה, מגמגם.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

humble, and therefore preoccupied with absorbing the lessons of life he felt he so sorely needed to learn, he assumed he would not be able to convey anything to others. His internal focus had adversely affected his ability to speak.²⁰⁵

Although Moses initially suffered from a speech im-

pediment, we see that as he grew into the role of the leader, he developed into the most eloquent of speakers. This is because the very cause of his speech impediment—his intense absorption in his own search for God and concomitant self-refinement—brought him to the selfless devotion to God and His people that drove him to speak when the time came.²⁰⁶

205. Sidur im Dach 110a. 206. Likutei Diburim 738a; Sefer HaSichot 5691, p. 248.

6 **GOD** gave Moses a **further sign**, and **said to him**, “**Put your hand in your bosom,**” so he put his hand in his bosom. When he withdrew it, his hand became afflicted with *tzara’at*, a disease that affects people guilty of slander,²⁰⁰ white as snow.

7 God said, “**Put your hand back in your bosom,**” so he put his hand back in his bosom. When he withdrew it from his bosom, it had already resumed the appearance of his skin—unlike the first time, when it became diseased only *after* he withdrew it from his bosom. God here showed Moses that His goodness is swifter than His punishment, and that the redemption from Egypt would proceed more quickly than the enslavement had.

8 God said: “**If they do not believe you, and will not heed the first miraculous sign**—i.e., how your staff became a snake—**then they will believe the second sign**—i.e., how you were punished for slandering them, for they have seen (in incidences involving Pharaoh²⁰¹ and Avimelech²⁰²) how those who seek to harm them are punished with diseases.

9 **And if they do not believe even these two signs, and still do not heed your voice, then you shall take some water from the Nile and pour it on the dry ground. The water that you take from the Nile will turn into blood when it is poured on the dry ground.**”

10 God tried to convince Moses for a full week to agree to take the people out of Egypt, but Moses was reluctant to assume any position greater than his elder brother Aaron. **Moses said to God: “I beg You, O God, I am not a man of words—not from yesterday, nor from the day before, nor from the first time You spoke to Your servant a week ago, for I stammer and am not swift of tongue.”**

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

10 For I stammer: Moses was exceedingly humble, as will be amply demonstrated as the story of his life

unfolds. Here, we see that he was so humble that he viewed his own humility as a fault. Because he was

✧ INNER DIMENSIONS ✧

[10] For I stammer: Moses’ soul originated in the world of *Tohu*,²⁰³ which is characterized by Divine consciousness that is too overwhelming to be articulated (i.e., “light” that is too powerful to be expressed in “vessels”). He understood that he would not be able to articulate any Divine revelation he would experience, and therefore was unfit to communicate God’s message. This handicap would disqualify him from leadership both with regard to the redemption itself, which would require him to address Pharaoh, and with regard to

the purpose of redemption, teaching the Torah to the people.

God therefore told Moses, “Who gives a man a mouth...Is it not I, God?” In other words, God told him that inasmuch as He Himself created the worlds of *Tohu* and *Tikun* (the world in which the “vessels” are strong enough to contain the “light”), He can override their mutual exclusivity and allow someone like Moses, despite his transcendental consciousness, to articulate himself in the context of *Tikun*.²⁰⁴

200. As seen in Numbrs 12:1-15; see Overview to *parashat Tazria*. 201. Genesis 12:10-20. 202. Genesis 20. 203. Above, on 2:6. 204. *Torah Or* 51b-52c; *Sefer HaSichot* 5752, vol. 1, pp. 285 ff.

ONKELOS

11 ואמר יי לה מאן שוי פמא לאנשא או מאן שוי אלמא או חרשא או פתיחא או עורא הלא אנא יי: 12 ובען איזיל ומימרי יהי עם פמך ואלפנך די תמליל: 13 ואמר בבעו יי שלח בען ביד מאן דכשר למשלח: 14 ותקיף רגזא דינ במלשה ואמר הלא אהרן אחור ליואזה גלי קדמי ארי מללא זמליל הוא ואף הא הוא נפיק לקדמונה ויחונף ויחדי בלבב: 15 ותמליל עמה ותשוי ית פתגמא בפמה ומימרי יהי עם פמך ועם פמה ואלוף יתכון ית די תעבדון:

11 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מִי שֵׁם פֶּה לְאָדָם או מִי־יָשׁוּם אֵלֶם או חֶרֶשׁ או פִּתְיָח או עוֹר הֲלֹא אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה: 12 וְעַתָּה לֵךְ וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ וְהוֹרִיתִךָ אִישׁר תִּבְדֹּב: 13 וַיֹּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנָי שְׁלַח־נָא בְיַד־תְּשֻׁלָּח: 14 וַיַּחֲרָאֵף יְהוָה בְּמֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲלֹא אֶהְרֹן אַחִיךָ הִלְוִי יִדְעָתִי כִּי־דָבָר יִדְבָר הוּא וְגַם הִנֵּה־הוּא יֵצֵא לִקְרֹאתְךָ וְרֹאֶךָ וְשָׁמַח בְּלִבּוֹ: 15 וְדַבַּרְתָּ אֵלָיו וְשַׁמְתָּ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים בְּפִיו וְאֲנֹכִי אֶהְיֶה עִם־פִּיךָ וְעִם־פִּיהוּ וְהוֹרִיתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶת אִישׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן:

RASHI

אומר: כל-חרון אף שבתורה, נאמר בו רשם, וזה לא נאמר בו רשם, ולא מצינו שבא ענש על ידי אותו חרון. אמר לו רבי יוסי: אף בזה נאמר בו רשם: "הלא אהרן אחיך הלוי" — שהיה עתיד להיות לוי ולא כהן, והכהונה הייתי אומר לצאת ממך, מעתה לא יהיה בן, אלא הוא יהיה כהן ואתה הלוי, שנאמר: "מלשה איש האלהים, בניו יקראו על-שבת הלוי": **הנה-הוא יצא לקראתך**. בשתלף למצרים: **וראך ושמח בלבב**. לא בשאתה סבור שיהא מקפיד עליך שאתה עולה לגדלה. ומשם זכה אהרן לעדי החשן הנתון על הלב:

11 **מי שם פה וגו'**. מי למדך לדבר, כשהיית גדון לפני פרעה על המצר: **או מִי־יָשׁוּם אֵלֶם**. מי עשה פרעה אֵלֶם, שלא נתאמץ במצות הריגתו. ואת־מִשְׁרְתִּיו חרשים, שלא שמעו בצותו עליה. ולא־סִפְקָלְטוּרִין ההורגים, מי עשאם עורים, שלא ראו כשברחת מן הבימה ונמלטת: **הלא אנכי**. ששמי "ה", עשיתי כל־זאת: 13 **בִּיד־תְּשֻׁלָּח**. ביד מי שאתה רגיל לשלוח, והוא אהרן. דבר אחר: ביד אחר שתצצה לשלוח, שאין סופי להכניסם לארץ ולהיות גואלים לעתיד, יש לך שלוחים הרבה: 14 **ויחראף**. רבי יהושע בן קרחה

93. דברי הימים א, כג, יד.

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

Divine assistance, and someone who agrees to be a leader limits the power at his disposal to his own, limited potentials. By first sincerely refusing to lead, the

future leader articulates his awareness that in order to lead successfully he must rely on God's infinite powers.²¹⁴

INNER DIMENSIONS

[13] Send whom You will send: Once God promised Moses that he would be able to articulate himself in the context of *Tikun*, Moses began to think in terms of doing this. But he was immediately struck by the fact that the *sefirot* of *Tikun* function harmoniously together, which is not the case in the world of *Tohu*. Seeing this, Moses felt humbled before the rest of his generation, whose souls descended from the world of *Tikun*. He felt unworthy of being their leader, and again declined.

Although Moses was correct about the advantage of *Tikun* over *Tohu*, he lost sight of the fact that the reason why the *sefirot* of *Tohu* do not interact is because their "light" is so intense. It was specifically because he embodied the unbounded Divine consciousness of the world of *Tohu* that he was uniquely suited for the role God called him to fulfill. Redemption is dependent on expressing the consciousness ("light") of *Tohu* in the context ("vessels") of *Tikun*.²¹⁵

214. *Sidur im Dach*, 20d-21a. 215. *Torah Or* 52b.

11 God said to him, “Who gives a man a mouth, as I gave you when I enabled you to defend yourself when you were being tried for killing the Egyptian? Who makes him dumb, as I made Pharaoh so he could not sentence you? or deaf, as I made his ministers so they could not hear his orders against you? or sighted, or blind, as I made the executioners when you fled? Is it not I, God?”

12 Now go, and I will be with you as you speak and instruct you what to say.”

13 Hearing this, Moses had to articulate his hesitation explicitly. **He said, “I beg you, O God! Please send Aaron, whom You usually send!** He is older than I and is already a prophet. Besides, since I am not destined to bring them into the land of Israel, and I will therefore not be their ultimate redeemer, what is the purpose in sending me?”

14 God displayed indignation toward Moses, and said: “Is not Aaron, your brother, the one whom I had intended to make **the Levite,** making you the priest? Because of your obstinacy in assuming leadership, I will eventually make *him* the priest and *you* the Levite.²⁰⁷ In any case, **I know that he can certainly speak!** He prophesied to the people when you were in Midian.²⁰⁸ As for your concern about assuming a position making you greater than him, **indeed, he will be setting out to meet you** when you set out on your journey to Egypt, **and when he sees you,** he will not be upset that I chose you to be the redeemer and not him; on the contrary, **his heart will be glad.**

15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. I will then be with your mouth and his mouth, and I will instruct you what to do.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

13 Whom You will send: According to our sages, Moses was suggesting that God send the Messiah.²⁰⁹ Why, he asked, doesn't God send someone who will finish the job?

Moses understood that God knew that he could not be the ultimate redeemer, yet nonetheless wished to send him. His complaint, then, took this into account and was justified.

Our sages therefore teach us that, at least allegorically, God acquiesced: Moses would be both the redeemer from Egypt and the final redeemer.²¹⁰ Although Moses and the Messiah are two separate people, they share each other's traits. Moses, primarily a teacher, hereafter evinced kingship. The Messiah, primarily a king, will also be a teacher.

Normally, these two traits call upon different psychological qualities. In order for someone to teach, he must be aware of his superiority over his students. In order for someone to rule—properly, that is—he must make himself a selfless, transparent conduit of the Divine power invested in him. Moses asked God to fuse these two traits into one.

Similarly, every Jew is God's emissary to redeem his portion of the world, and therefore possesses a spark of both Moses²¹¹ and the Messiah.²¹² In order to fulfill his mission, he must evince both the teacher's initiative and creativity and the king's selfless devotion to his mission.²¹³

By refusing the mantle of leadership, Moses demonstrated that he was worthy of it. Leadership requires

²⁰⁷. Moses retained the status of priest until Aaron and his sons were initiated into this office, on the 1st of Nisan, 2449 (*Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 175, note 28). ²⁰⁸. Above, on 2:25. ²⁰⁹. *Pesikta Zotarta* on this verse. ²¹⁰. *Shemot Rabbah* 2:4, 6; *Zohar* 1:253a; *Sha'ar HaPesukim*, *Vayechi*; *Torah Or* 75b. ²¹¹. *Tanya*, ch. 42 (59a). ²¹². *Me'or Einain*, *Pinchas*. ²¹³. *Sefer HaSichot* 5752, vol. 1, pp. 97-98, 107-109.

— ONKELOS —

16 וימליל הוא לך עם עמא ויהי
הוא יהי לך למתורגמן ואת תהי
לה לרב: 17 ונת חוטרא ודין תסב
בידך די תעביד בה ית אתיא:
18 ואזל משה ותב לות יתר חמוהי
ואמר לה איזיל בען ואיתוב לות
אחי די במצרים ואחזי העד בען
אנון קימין ואמר יתרו למשה
איזיל לשלם: 19 ואמר יי למשה
במדון איזיל תוב למצרים ארי
מיתו כל-גבריא דבעו למקטלה:
20 ודבר משה ית אתתה וית
בגוהי וארפיבנון על חמרא ותב
לארעא דמצרים ונסיב משה ית
חוטרא דאתעבידו בה נסין מן קדם
יי בידה:

16 וְדַבֵּר-הוּא לְךָ אֶל-הָעָם וְהִיָּה הוּא יְהִי-הֶלֶךְ לְפָנֶיךָ
וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה-לּוֹ לְאֱלֹהִים: 17 וְאֶת-הַמַּטֶּה הַזֶּה תִּקַּח
בְּיָדְךָ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה-בּוֹ אֶת-הָאֵתָת: פ
שִׁשִּׁי 18 וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וַיָּשָׁב אֶל-יִתְרֹן חֹתָנּוֹ וַיֹּאמֶר
לוֹ אֶלְכֶּה-נָּא וְאֲשׁוּבָה אֶל-אֲחִי אֲשֶׁר-בְּמִצְרַיִם
וְאַרְאֶה הָעוֹדָם חַיִּים וַיֹּאמֶר יִתְרוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה לֵךְ לְשָׁלוֹם:
19 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה בְּמִדְיָן לֵךְ שָׁב מִצְרַיִם כִּי-
מָתוּ כָּל-הָאֲנָשִׁים הַמְּבַקְשִׁים אֶת-נַפְשְׁךָ: 20 וַיִּקַּח
מֹשֶׁה אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ וְאֶת-בָּנָיו וַיָּרֻבּוּ עַל-הַחֲמֹר וַיָּשָׁב
אֶרְצָה מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-מַטֵּה הָאֱלֹהִים בְּיָדוֹ:

— RASHI —

מתו כל-האנשים. מי הם? דתן ואבירם. חיים
היו אלא שִׁירְדוּ מִנְּכֻסֵיהֶם, וְהֶעֱנִי חֲשׁוֹב כְּמַת:
20 עַל-הַחֲמֹר. חמור המיוחד, הוא החמור שֶׁחִבֵּשׁ
אֲבָרָהָם לַעֲקֶדֶת יִצְחָק, וְהוּא שְׁעֵתִיד מִלֶּךְ הַמְּשִׁיחַ
לְהַגְלוֹת עָלָיו, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "עֲנִי וְרִכֵּב עַל-חֲמֹר": 21 וַיָּשָׁב
אֶרְצָה מִצְרַיִם וַיִּקַּח מֹשֶׁה אֶת-מֹטֵה וְגו'. אֵין מִקְדָּם
וּמֵאַחֵר מִדְּקָדְקִים בְּמִקְרָא:

16 וְדַבֵּר-הוּא לְךָ. בְּשִׁבְלֶךָ יְדַבֵּר אֶל הָעָם. וְהִיָּה יוֹכִיחַ
עַל כָּל "לֶךְ" ו"לִי" ו"לּוֹ" ו"לָכֶם" ו"לָהֶם" הַסְּמוּכִים
לְדַבּוֹר, שֶׁכֻּלָּם לְשׁוֹן "עַל" הֵם: יְהִיָּה לְךָ לְפָנֶיךָ. לְמַלְיָךְ,
לְפִי שְׁאֵתָה כְּבֹד פֶּה: לְאֱלֹהִים. לָרֵב וּלְשׁוֹר: 18 וַיָּשָׁב
אֶל-יִתְרֹן חֹתָנּוֹ. לְטַל רְשׁוּת, שֶׁהָרִי נִשְׁבַּע לוֹ שֶׁלֹּא
יִזְוֶה מִמֶּדְיָן כִּי אִם בְּרִשְׁוֹתוֹ. וְשִׁבְעָה שְׁמוֹת הָיוּ לוֹ:
רַעְיוֹאֵל, יִתְרֹן, יִתְרוֹ, קִינִי, חֹבֶב, חֶבֶר, פּוּטִיאֵל: 19 כִּי

94. זכריה ט, ט.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Moses, and the Messiah used the donkey thus reflects the three stages in our elevation and purification of the material world.

In Abraham's time, before the giving of the Torah, materiality could at best be controlled and tamed so as not to interfere with the pursuit of holiness.²²⁵ Material things or pursuits could be harnessed temporarily for holy purposes, but could not *themselves* become holy. Abraham therefore only put his wood and knife on the donkey, indicating that materiality at that point could only be used as an instrument for holiness.

In Moses' time, after the purification process of the exile and as the Torah was about to be given, it became possible to sanctify materiality by imbuing it with Divine consciousness. Thus, although Moses himself could not yet ride the donkey, he could put his wife and children on it. As we have seen before, the "femi-

nine" side of our personality is our drive to reveal Divinity in the physical world and, in this context, our "progeny" is the heightened Divine consciousness we propagate by revealing Divinity. With the giving of the Torah, it became possible for Divinity to transform materiality from an obstacle into a vehicle for Divine purposes.

In the messianic era, materiality will be consummately refined. Fully stripped of its negative context, it will be able to propel the soul beyond its innate capacities of awareness into consummate consciousness of God's essence.²²⁶ Even our "masculine" sides, our drive for abstract holiness, will be able to "ride the donkey," to be fulfilled through material things.

Analogously, these three stages exist in every individual's personal spiritual development, particularly *vis-à-vis* his ability to elevate and refine materiality. In

225. In fact, we are taught that Abraham was the first person to harness a donkey (*Tzeror HaMor* on Genesis 22:3). 226. This is because materiality, i.e., the erroneous presumption of possessing self-sustaining existence, can be derived only from God's essence, the true reality of self-sustaining existence. (In contrast, spirituality, i.e., the awareness of being dependent on God's reality, does not derive directly from God's essence but rather from His revelation.)

16 He will speak to the people for you. He will thus serve as your mouth, which you insist is not capable of speaking clearly, **and you will be his mentor.** You will not have to speak directly to the people at all.

17 And in your hand you shall take this staff, with which you will perform the miraculous signs."

Moses Sets Out for Egypt

- ◆ **Sixth Reading** 18 Having accepted God's mission, **Moses left and returned** to Midian, to his father-in-law **Jether**—i.e., Jethro.²¹⁶ Moses was proud of **his father-in-law** and assumed God chose him for his mission in his father-in-law's merit.²¹⁷ He respectfully asked Jethro's permission to go,²¹⁸ **and said to him, "I would like to leave and return to my brethren in Egypt, to see if they are still alive."** Jethro said to Moses, **"Go in peace."**

19 Moses was still afraid that Dathan and Aviram would try to thwart his mission, so **God said to Moses in Midian, "You can go back to Egypt** without worry, **for all the men who seek your life,** i.e., Dathan and Aviram, **have lost their fortunes** and therefore all their social status and clout, so it is as if they have **died."**

20 Moses took his wife and sons and mounted them on the same donkey²¹⁹ that Abraham saddled when he took Isaac to be bound²²⁰ and on whom the Messiah will ride when he is revealed.²²¹ **And he prepared to go back to the land of Egypt; and Moses took the staff of God in his hand.** Having been used for God's miracles, Moses' staff now became "the staff of God."

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

20 The donkey: The Torah takes the trouble to tell us that Moses took his family back to Egypt on this miraculous donkey because this is how God answered Moses' request that He send someone else to redeem Israel. As we saw above, Moses had two reasons to demur: (1) he hesitated to rise to a higher position than his elder brother, and (2) he knew that, in any case, he would not bring the people to their final redemption, and therefore thought that the exercise was fruitless.

To answer these complaints, God had Moses ride the donkey that Abraham had readily saddled to fulfill His command, indicating to him that he, too, should fulfill God's command without hesitation. The fact that this donkey was also the one that the Messiah will ride indicated that Moses should regard the redemption from Egypt not as a failed attempt to reach the ultimate redemption but as a necessary phase in it. Furthermore, by emphasizing that the Messiah will be revealed riding specifically on a lowly *donkey*, God was telling Moses that his humility (in wishing to de-

fer to Aaron) was in fact his prime qualification for the role of redeemer.²²²

Allegorically, the donkey alludes to the material world, for the word for "donkey" (*chamor*) shares the same root as "materiality" (*chomer*).²²³ Just as a donkey enables a person to travel much farther and carry more than he could by himself, the material world enables the soul to accomplish much more than it could without it. Nonetheless, the *a priori* nature of the material world is to obstruct Divine consciousness and, therefore, great care must be taken in how we become involved with it.

With regard to Abraham, the Torah only tells us that he *saddled* the donkey, implying that neither he, nor Isaac, nor those accompanying them actually *rode* on the donkey.²²⁴ In contrast, although Moses did not ride the donkey himself, he had his wife and children ride it. Finally, we are told that the Messiah will ride the donkey himself. The progression in how Abraham,

²¹⁶ Rashi here and on 18:1. ²¹⁷ Rashi on 18:1. ²¹⁸ Above, 2:21. ²¹⁹ I.e., not just *a* donkey but *the* donkey. ²²⁰ Genesis 22:3. ²²¹ Zechariah 9:9. ²²² *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, pp. 15-19. ²²³ *Gur Aryeh* on this verse; *Gevurot Hashem* 29, etc. ²²⁴ See on Genesis 22:3.

— ONKELOS —

21 ואמר יי למשה במהך למתב למצרים חזי כל-מופתים די שויתי בידך ותעבדנן קדם פרעה ואנא אתקיף ית לבה ולא ישלח ית עמא: 22 ותימר לפרעה כדנן אמר יי ברי בוכרי ישראל: 23 ואמרית לך שלח ית ברי ויפלח קדמי ומסרר את לשלוחיה: 24 והנה אנא קטל ית ברך בוכרך: 24 והנה בארחה בבית מבתא וערע בה מלאכא דיי ובקא למקטלה:

21 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה בְּלִכְתְּךָ לָשׁוּב מִצְרָיִם רְאֵה כָּל־הַמּוֹפְתִים אֲשֶׁר־שִׁמְתִּי בְיָדְךָ וַעֲשִׂיתָם לִפְנֵי פַרְעֹה וְאֲנִי אֲחֻזֵּק אֶת־לְבָבוֹ וְלֹא יִשְׁלַח אֶת־הָעָם: 22 וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה בְּנֵי בְכוֹרֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 23 וַאֲמַר אֵלֶיךָ שְׁלַח אֶת־בְּנִי וַעֲבַדְנִי וְתִמְאַן לְשַׁלְּחוֹ הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי הֹלֵךְ אֶת־בְּנֶךָ בְּכֶרֶךָ: 24 וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בְּמִלּוֹן וַיִּפְגְּשׁוּהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הַמִּיתוֹ:

— RASHI —

מפני שהיא קשה. וזה הוא שנאמר באיוב: "הן-אל ישגיב בכו"ס", לפיכך "מי כמוהו מורה". בשר ודם המבקש להנצחם מחברו, מעלים את דבריו שלא יבקש הצלה, אבל הקדוש ברוך-הוא ישגיב בכו"ס ואין יכולת להמלט מידו כי אם בשובו אליו, לפיכך הוא מורה ומתרה בו לשוב: 24 ויהי. משה בדרך במלון ויבקש המיתו. המלאך למשה, לפי שלא מל את אליעזר בנו, ועל שנתרשל נענש ענש מיתה. תניא אמר רבי יוסי: חס ושלום, לא נתרשל, אלא אמר: אמול ואצא לדרך — סכנה היא לתינוק, עד שלשה ימים, אמול ואשקה שלשה ימים — הקדוש ברוך-הוא צוני: "לך שב מצרים".⁹⁵ ומפני מה נענש מיתה? לפי שנתעסק במלון תחלה. במסכת נדרים⁹⁶. והיה המלאך נעשה כמין נחש, ובלעו מראשו ועד ירכיו, וחזרו ובלעו מגוליו ועד אותו מקום, הבינה צפורה שבשכיל המילה הוא:

21 בְּלִכְתְּךָ לָשׁוּב מִצְרָיִם וְגו'. דע, שעל מנת כן תלך שתהא גבור בשליחותי, לעשות כל-מופתים לפני פרעה, ולא תירא ממנו: אֲשֶׁר־שִׁמְתִּי בְיָדְךָ. לא על שלש אותות האמורות למעלה, שהרי לא לפני פרעה צוה לעשותם, אלא לפני ישראל שיאמינו לו, ולא מצינו שעשאים לפניו. אלא, מופתים שאני עתיד לשום בידך במצרים, כמו: "כי ידבר אלכם פרעה"⁹⁷ וגו'. ולא תתמה על אשר כתיב "אשר-שמת", שכן משמעו: בשתדבר עמו, כבר שמתים בידך: 22 וַאֲמַרְתָּ אֶל־פַּרְעֹה. בשתשמע שלבו חזק וימאן לשלח, אמר לו כן: בְּנֵי בְכוֹרֵי. לשון גדלה, כמו: "אף-אני בכור אתנהו"⁹⁸. והו' פשוט. ומדרשו:⁹⁹ כאן חתם הקדוש ברוך-הוא על מכירת הבכורה שלקח יעקב מעשו: 23 וַאֲמַר אֵלֶיךָ. בשליחותי של מקום: שלח את-בני וגו'. הנה אנכי הולך וגו'. היא מכה אחרונה, ובה התרהו תחלה

95. שמות ז, ט. 96. תהלים פט, כח. 97. בראשית רבה טז, יד. 98. איוב לו, כב. 99. שמות ד, יט. 100. דף לא, ב.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Moses took the staff of God in his hand: Even though, as we see throughout the story, Moses gave Pharaoh the honor due him as a king and spoke respectfully to him, he made no compromises in his demands concerning the people's spiritual and physical needs. He spoke with "the staff of God in his hand," with true Jewish authority and determination.

The lesson for us here is that whenever we are confronted with an "Egyptian king," someone who seeks to impose upon us elements of a lifestyle that are antithetical to Jewish values—even if this is done solicitously or innocently—we must recognize the inherent danger in succumbing to such pressure. In the end,

this Pharaoh will tell us to drown ourselves (or our children) in material culture. We must therefore respectfully but resolutely insist on living according to the Torah's values.²³²

22 My preeminent son: By referring to the Jewish people as His son, God implied that (a) He would be angry with anyone who harms them, the same as a father would be angry with anyone who harms his child,²³³ and (b) the love between Him and them is as essential as that between a father and a son. No matter how depraved the people may have become, God's love for them always remains intact. And conversely, every Jew feels as close as son or daughter to God; this

231. Likutei Sichot, vol. 31, pp. 19 ff; vol. 1, pp. 70-73. 232. Likutei Sichot, vol. 16, pp. 11-12. 233. Sefer HaMa'amarim 5701, p. 82; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5684, p. 236.

21 God said to Moses, “When you go back to Egypt, be aware of all the wondrous powers that I will have placed in your hand when you stand before Pharaoh, and do not hesitate to use them before Pharaoh. However, I know that because he will refuse to listen to Me, I shall harden his heart²²⁷ and he will not allow the people to leave.

22 You shall then say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus has God said: “Of all My children, the nations of the earth, Israel is My preeminent son, whom I have chosen to fulfill My mission. Furthermore, in the lineage of the patriarchs of My chosen nation, their progenitor Israel, although born after Esau, purchased the birthright from him and is therefore the firstborn son in this respect, as well.”

23 I am therefore telling you in God’s Name: “Send forth My son so that he may serve Me. Yet I know that you will refuse to let him leave, so know now that in order to secure Israel’s release from your country, I will kill your firstborn son, and you have no defense against My threat.””

24 So Moses prepared to go. But Zipporah had just given birth to their second son, Eliezer. Moses knew that if he circumcised his son before they left, they would have to wait to set out until the baby healed. However, since God had not waited for this but had told him to go, he understood that he should not delay following God’s command, and postponed the circumcision so he could set out immediately. When they were at their lodgings on the way, closer to their destination and the danger to the infant was not so great, Moses could have safely circumcised him. But instead of circumcising him immediately, he arranged their lodgings first. Although this was a slight oversight, it indicated that Moses had not absorbed the full gravity of obeying God’s will and was therefore unfit to serve as the people’s leader and example. God therefore confronted Moses and sought to put him to death, because he had abrogated his mission in life and thus forfeited his right to live.

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

the early stages of our spiritual development, we need to subdue our inborn material orientation, preventing it from acting as an obstacle to our holier pursuits. As we mature, the Divine consciousness generated by the Torah we study and the commandments we perform begins to permeate our materiality. We can begin to use materiality for holy purposes (for example, we can eat, sleep, earn a living, etc., with the intention to thereby have the means to study the Torah and perform the commandments). In this way, we fulfill the sages’ instruction that “all your deeds should be done for the sake of heaven.”²²⁸ Finally, as we refine our materiality, our material experiences themselves are transformed into vehicles for experiencing Divin-

ity. In this way, we fulfill the verse,²²⁹ “Know Him in all your ways.”

In fact, the prophets use *two* images to describe the advent of the Messiah. In one, he is “poor, riding on a donkey”; in the other, he comes “with the clouds of heaven.”²³⁰ We may reconcile these images by applying them to the two facets of the Divine revelation that will accompany the messianic Redemption. Using materiality “for the sake of heaven” will reveal “the clouds of heaven,” the innate spirituality within creation. Knowing God “in all your ways” will reveal the Divinity that is “riding on the donkey,” the transcendent consciousness of God’s essence.²³¹

227. See below, 7:3. 228. Avot 2:12; see *Mishneh Torah*, *Dei’ot* 3:3. 229. Proverbs 3:6; see *Mishneh Torah*, *loc cit.* 230. Daniel 7:13.

— ONKELOS —

25 וְנִסִּיבַת צְפוּרָה טָרָא וְגִזְרַת
יֵת עוֹרֵלַת בְּרָה וְקָרִיבַת לְקַדְמוּזִי
וְאָמְרַת אָרִי בְדָמָא דְמַהוּלָּתָא
הָדִין אֲתִיבָה חֲתָנָא לָנָא: 26 וְנָח
מִנָּה בְּכֹן אָמְרַת אֱלֹוִי דְמָא
דְמַהוּלָּתָא הָדִין אֲתִיבָה חֲתָנָא
קָטוֹל: 27 וְאָמַר יֵי לְאַהֲרֹן אִיזִיל
לְקַדְמוּת מִשָּׁה לְמַדְבָּרָא וְאִזִּל
וְעָרְעָה בְּטוּרָא דְאַתְגָּלִי עֲלוּזִי
יִקְרָא דִיִּי וְנָשִׁיק לָהּ: 28 וְחֹזִי מִשָּׁה
לְאַהֲרֹן יֵת כְּלִפְתָּנָמְיָא דִיִּי דִי
שְׁלַחָה וְיֵת כְּלִפְתָּנָמְיָא דִי פְקָדָה:
29 וְאִזִּל מִשָּׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּבָנָשׁוּ יֵת
כְּלִפְתָּנָמְיָא בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 30 וּמְלִיל
אַהֲרֹן יֵת כְּלִפְתָּנָמְיָא דִי מְלִיל
יֵי עַם מִשָּׁה וְעַבְדֵּי אֲתִיָּא לְעִינֵי
עַמָּא: 31 וְחִימִין עַמָּא וְשָׁמְעוּ
אָרִי דְכִיר יֵי יֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָרִי
גָלִי קְדָמוּזִי שְׁעִבּוּדָהוֹן וּכְרַעוּ
וּסְגִידוּ: 31 וְכִתְרָ בֶן עֲלוּ מִשָּׁה
וְאַהֲרֹן וְאָמְרוּ לְפָרְעָה בְּדִנָּן אָמַר
יֵי אֱלֹהָא דִיִּשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלַח יֵת עַמִּי
וְיַחְגּוּן קְדָמִי בְּמַדְבָּרָא:

25 וְתִלְקָה צְפוּרָה צֹר וְתִכְרַת אֶת־עֶרְלַת בְּנָהּ וְתַנְעֵ
לְרַגְלֶיהָ וְתֹאמַר בִּי חֲתַן־דָּמִים אַתָּה לִי: 26 וַיֵּרָף מִמֶּנּוּ
אֹז אִמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לְמוֹלֶת: פ
27 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵךְ לִקְרַאת מֹשֶׁה הַמַּדְבָּרָה
וַיֵּלֶךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ בְּהַר הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁקֻלוּ: 28 וַיַּגֵּד מֹשֶׁה
לְאַהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־דְּבָרֵי יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר שְׁלָחוּ וְאֵת כָּל־הָאֲתָת
אֲשֶׁר צִוָּהוּ: 29 וַיֵּלֶךְ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאסְפוּ אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵי
בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: 30 וַיְדַבֵּר אֲהֲרֹן אֵת כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־
דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה וַיַּעַשׂ הָאֲתָת לְעֵינֵי הָעָם: 31 וַיֹּאמְרוּ
הָעָם וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ כִּי־פָקֵד יְהוָה אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכִי רָאָה
אֶת־עַנְיָם וַיִּקְרְאוּ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ:
◆ שְׁבִיעִי 5:1 וְאַחֵר בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֶל־פְּרָעָה
כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלַח אֶת־עַמִּי וַיַּחְגּוּ לִי
בַּמַּדְבָּר:

— RASHI —

לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל¹⁰¹. וְאוֹנְקֵלוֹס תִּרְגֵּם: "דָּמִים" — עַל דָּם
הַמִּילָה: 1 וְאַחֵר בָּאוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וְגו'. אֲכָל הַזִּקְנִים
נִשְׁמְטוּ אֶחָד אֶחָד, מֵאַחֵר מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן, עַד שֶׁנִּשְׁמְטוּ
כֻּלָּם קָדָם שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְפָלֶטִין, לְפִי שִׁירָאוּ לְלָכֶת. וּבִסְיָנִי
נִפְרַע לָהֶם — "וַיַּגֵּשׁ מֹשֶׁה לְבָדוּ...וְהֵם לֹא יִגְשׁוּ"¹⁰²,
הַחֲזִירִים לְאַחֲרֵיהֶם:

25 וְתַנְעֵ לְרַגְלֶיהָ. הַשְׁלִיכְתּוּ לִפְנֵי רַגְלֶיהָ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה:
וְתֹאמַר. עַל בְּנָהּ: בִּי חֲתַן־דָּמִים אַתָּה לִי. אַתָּה הִייתָ
גֹּרֶם, לְהִיּוֹת הַחֲתָן שְׁלִי נִרְצָח עֲלֶיךָ, הוֹרֵג אִישִׁי אַתָּה
לִי: 26 וַיֵּרָף. הַפְּלֹאֵף "מִמֶּנּוּ": אֹז. הַבִּינָה שֶׁעַל הַמִּילָה
בָּא לְהַרְגוֹ: אִמְרָה חֲתַן דָּמִים לְמוֹלֶת. חֲתַנִּי הִיָּה נִרְצָח
עַל דְּבַר הַמִּילָה: לְמוֹלֶת. עַל דְּבַר הַמוּלֹת, שֶׁם דְּבַר
הוּא, וְהַלֵּמָּה "דְּמִשְׁמֶשֶׁת בְּלִשׁוֹן "עַל", כְּמוֹ: "וְאָמַר פְּרָעָה

101. שְׁמוֹת יד, ג. 102. שְׁמוֹת כד, ב.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

feeling may sometimes fall dormant, but it can always
be awakened.²³⁸

Sometimes, God expresses His love for His people by
calling them His "little son." This is because a parent's
love for his infant child is pure. It is not obscured by
any appreciation the parent may have for his child's
acquired qualities or achievements. It is an expression
of their essential connection, the parent loving the
child simply because it is his child.

Here, however, God expresses His love for His people
by calling them His "eminent" child, indicating His

appreciation for their accomplishments. This is be-
cause ideally, our achievements should *enhance* our
consciousness of our essential connection to God, not
obscure it. We should strive to mature intellectually,
emotionally, and behaviorally because of our simple,
filial devotion to God's will. In this way, we demon-
strate our desire to permeate all aspects of our lives
with this devotion. By retaining this essential, child-
like bond with God even while exercising our own
prowess, God's pure parental love for us will remain
undiluted—and even be enhanced—by our accom-
plishments.²³⁹

238. Tanya, chapter 2; Sefer HaMa'amarim 5689, p. 112. 239. Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, pp. 20-26.

25 He sent an angel in the form of a snake, and this angel swallowed him from his head to his thigh, spit him out, and then swallowed him again from his feet to his thigh. Witnessing this, Zipporah understood why God's angel was about to kill her husband. **So Zipporah quickly took a sharp stone and cut off her son's foreskin herself and threw it down at Moses' feet. She said to the baby: "You almost caused my bridegroom's bloodshed!"**

26 Seeing Zipporah's alacrity, God was assured that her positive influence would correct Moses' negligent attitude. The angel **then released Moses, and Zipporah said, "My bridegroom's bloodshed was almost occasioned by circumcision."**

27 **God said to Aaron in Egypt, "Go into the desert to meet Moses." He went and met him at the Mountain of God, i.e., Mount Sinai, where God had revealed Himself to Moses, and kissed him.**

28 **Moses related to Aaron all the words of God, who had dispatched him, as well as all the miraculous signs about which He had instructed him.** When Aaron saw Moses' wife and children, he said, "We are troubled that our people are in Egypt, and you want to add to their ranks?" Moses concurred, and sent his wife and children back to Midian.²³⁴

29 **So Moses and Aaron went together to Egypt, and they assembled all the elders of the Israelites.** Inasmuch as the tribe of Levi was not enslaved, Moses and Aaron could come and go as they pleased.²³⁵

30 **Aaron related all the words that God had told Moses, and performed the miraculous signs before the people.**

31 Throughout the long years of exile, the people had held fast to their belief that God would one day redeem them. But as the slavery had worsened and time wore on, certain elements of the people had become skeptical and even begun to chide and mock those who still believed. The combination of suffering and scoffing had made the majority almost despair of ever being redeemed. But when Moses and Aaron announced the imminent redemption, **the people believed, and when they heard that God had taken note of the Israelites and that He had observed their misery, they bowed down and prostrated themselves in thanks.**²³⁶

Moses Meets Pharaoh

- ◆ *Seventh Reading 5:1* Although the elders were meant to go with Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh,²³⁷ they slipped away one by one, so that in the end, only **Moses and Aaron later went to Pharaoh and said, "This is what God, the God of Israel, has said: 'Send forth My people, so that they may celebrate a festival for Me in the wilderness.'"**

234. Rashi on 18:2, below. 235. See above, 1:10. Rashi on 5:4, below. 236. *Sefer HaMa'amarim* 5705, pp. 174-175. 237. See above, 3:18.

— ONKELOS —

2 ואמר פרעה שמא דיין לא אתגלי לי די אקבל למימרה לשלחא ית ישראל לא אתגלי לי שמא דיין ואף ית ישראל לא אשלח: 3 ואמרו אלהא דיהודאי אתגלי עלנא גזיל בען מהלך תלתא יומין במדברא וגדבא קדם יי אלהא דלמא יערענא במותא או בקטול: 4 ואמר להון מלכא דמצרים למא משה ואהרן תבטלון ית עמא מעבדתהון איזילו לפלחבון:

2 ויאמר פרעה מי יהוה אשר אשמע בקולו לשלח את ישראל לא ידעתי את יהוה וגם את ישראל לא אשלח: 3 ויאמרו אלהי העברים נקרא עלינו נלכה נא דרך שלשת ימים במדבר ונבחה ליהוה אלהינו פן יפגענו בדבר או בחרב: 4 ויאמר אלהם מלך מצרים למשה ואהרן תפריעו את העם ממעשיו לכו לסבלתיכם:

— RASHI —

וכן "ותפריעו כל-עצתי"¹⁰⁴, "כי פרע הוא"¹⁰⁵ — נרחק ונתעב: לכו לסבלתיכם. לכו למלאכתכם שיש לכם לעשות בבתים. אבל מלאכת שעבוד מצרים לא היתה על שבטו של לוי. ותדע לה, שהרי משה ואהרן יוצאים ובאים שלא בראש:

3 פן יפגענו. פן יפגעך היו צריכים לומר? אלא, שחלקו כבוד למלכות. "פגיעה" זו, לשון מקרה מות היא: 4 תפריעו את העם ממעשיו. תבדילו ותרחיקו אותם ממלאכתם, ששומעין לכם, וסבורים לנוח מן המלאכה. וכן "פרעוהו אל-תעבר-בו"¹⁰³ — רחקהו.

¹⁰³ משלי ד, טו. ¹⁰⁴ שם א, כה. ¹⁰⁵ שמות לב, כה.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

Moses, Aaron, and the rest of the Levites assuredly had their own domestic affairs to attend to, as Pharaoh correctly assumed. Pharaoh erred only in assuming that the Levites considered these to be a "chore" and were therefore looking for some escape. In truth, the Levites took care of their private affairs willingly and capably.

The lesson here is that even someone who, like a Levite, has dedicated his life to studying and disseminating the Torah, fulfilling its commandments, and en-

couraging and enabling others to do likewise, should not shirk his domestic responsibilities. If he is lax in these, it probably means he is lax in his main work as well. Rather, he must do his share of helping around the house and, if he is a parent, educating his sons and daughters. Let him take his example from Moses and Aaron: although they took the time to run their households properly, this did not keep them from fulfilling their mission to bring God's word to Pharaoh.²⁴⁵

Allegorically, there is a Pharaoh within each of us:

— A CLOSER LOOK —

[3] Let us therefore make a three-day journey: Even though he intended for the Jews to leave Egypt permanently, Moses asked Pharaoh's permission for just a three-day journey. He did this in order to demonstrate Pharaoh's cruelty: after two hundred and ten years of slavery, he would not agree to even three days of vacation. The cruel plagues with which God would punish the Egyptians were therefore not excessive, but rather a fitting punishment for their own, excessive cruelty. Even later, when Pharaoh agreed to let the Jews go,

he kept rescinding his permission. Only after the last plague did he see that there was truly no alternative but to let them go.

Furthermore, Moses did not technically lie, since he never said that the people would return after three days. The implication was that after three days, he and his people would decide whether or not they would return. This explains why the Egyptians saw the Jews take all their possessions with them for this supposedly three-day excursion and did not question them about it.²⁴⁶

245. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, pp. 792-793. 246. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 6, p. 255.

2 Pharaoh replied, “Who is God that I should heed His voice and let Israel go? I do not recognize God, nor will I let Israel leave.”

3 They said, “The God of the Hebrews has appeared to us. Let us therefore make a three-day journey in the wilderness and we shall sacrifice to God, our God, lest He strike us [i.e., *you*—they spoke euphemistically out of respect for Pharaoh’s office—] with a plague or the sword.”

4 The king of Egypt said to them, “Moses and Aaron, why are you distracting the people from their daily work? I don’t believe that God revealed Himself to you and told you to take them on vacation. And anyway, they don’t need a vacation: I am not overburdening them with an excessive workload, for they accepted this work upon themselves willingly and have gotten used to it! No, I think you’ve come here with these stories because you’re lazy and trying to avoid your own personal obligations. And the same probably applies to your whole tribe: you all want to avoid running your home affairs, so you came up with this idea of taking the people into the desert to offer sacrifices. Well, I advise you to stop being lazy and **get back to your own chores!”²⁴⁰**

✧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ✧

2 I do not recognize God: As we mentioned previously, the Divine Name *Havayah* (translated here as “God,” with small capitals) refers to the transcendent aspects of God, to God as He exists outside the context of creation. In contrast, the Name *Elokim* (translated here as “God,” with lower case letters) refers to the immanent aspects of God, that is, to God the Creator, to the aspects of God that are discernable or can be deduced by observing created reality.

Pharaoh did indeed believe in the immanent aspects of God, but he knew nothing of God’s transcendent aspects. He knew that God created the world and established certain rules as laws of nature, one of which is that the strong should overpower and rule the weak. Since the Egyptians were stronger than the Jews, Pharaoh felt that it was their God-given right to rule over them. He could not accept the possibility that there was an aspect of God that transcended nature, that could override the laws of nature and declare that the strong should release the weak from their rule, even against their will, simply because this is the right thing to do.²⁴¹

Another way of viewing this is that Pharaoh was a deist: he believed that God created the world but then abandoned it to the forces of nature, which are henceforth immutable.²⁴²

God therefore sent Moses to perform miracles and plagues before Pharaoh, to show him that God is not limited by the laws of nature.²⁴³

4 Get back to your own chores: Pharaoh was a wise man. He realized that every nation needs its elite class devoted to preserving its cultural identity and lore. He therefore did not object to Moses and Aaron learning and even teaching the Torah to the other Jews. He objected to their upsetting the status quo, by which the Jews were enslaved both because the Egyptians were more powerful than they were and because their Divinely-ordained sentence of four hundred years of slavery had not yet ended.

The essence of the Exodus, however, was to demonstrate that the Jewish people are not bound by the laws of nature, and therefore Moses and Aaron did not accept Pharaoh’s reasoning.

The lesson for us here is that those who are fortunate enough to be relatively free from the cultural enslavement of materialistic society should never succumb to complacency. As long as there are those “enslaved” to materialism, we should not hesitate to defy the conception that religion belongs to a clerical elite or only to special occasions. We must seek to free everyone from the bonds of material slavery and allow the Torah to permeate all aspects of life.²⁴⁴

^{240.} *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, vol. 1, pp. 779-781, 788-791. ^{241.} *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5679, pp. 360 ff; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5688, pp. 68 ff; *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 1, pp. 239 ff. ^{242.} *Or HaTorah, Shemot*, pp. 1985-1986. ^{243.} *Torah Or* 50b; *Sefer HaMa’amarim* 5705, p. 139. ^{244.} *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 29-32.

— ONKELOS —

5 ויאמר פרעה הא סגיאין בען עמא דארעא ותבטלון יתהון מפלחנהון: 6 ופקיד פרעה ביומא ההוא ית שלטוני עמא וית סרכוהי למימר: 7 לא תוספון למתן תבנא לעמא למרמי לבנין במאמלי ומדקדמוהי אנון ייזלון ויגבון להון תבנא: 8 וית סכום לבניא די אנון עבדין מאמלי ומדקדמוהי תמנון עליהון לא תמנעון מזה ארי בטלנין אנון על פן אנון מצוהין למימר גיזיל נדבח קדם אלהא: 9 ותתקף פלחנא על גבריא ויתעסקון בה ולא יתעסקון בפתגמין בטיילין: 10 ונפקו שלטוני עמא וסרכוהי ואמרו לעמא למימר כדון אמר פרעה לית אנא זיהב לכון תבנא: 11 אתון איזילו סיבו לכון תבנא מאתר דתשכחון ארי לא יתמנע מפלחנכון מדע: 12 ואתבדר עמא בכל-ארעא דמצרים לגבא גילי לתבנא:

5 ויאמר פרעה הן-רבים עתה עם-הארץ והשבתם אתם מסבלתם: 6 ויצו פרעה ביום ההוא את-הנגשים בעם ואת-שטריו לאמר: 7 לא תאספון לתת תבן לעם ללבן הלבנים בתמול שלשם הם ילכו וקששו להם תבן: 8 ואת-מתכנת הלבנים אשר הם עשים תמול שלשם תשימו עליהם לא תגרעו ממנו כי-נרפים הם עלין הם צעקים לאמר גלכה נזבחה לאלהינו: 9 תכבד העבודה על-האנשים ועשו-בה ואל-ישעו בדברי-שקר: 10 ויצאו נגשי העם ושטריו ויאמרו אל-העם לאמר כה אמר פרעה אינני נתן לכם תבן: 11 אתם לכו קחו לכם תבן מאשר תמצאו כי אין נגרע מעבודתכם דבר: 12 ויפץ העם בכל-ארץ מצרים לקשש קש לתבן:

— RASHI —

מתרגמינן: "ולשועי". "ויספר" — "ואשתעי". ואי אפשר לומר "ישעו" לשון "וישע" ה' אלהיך וגו' ואלי- קין ואלי-מנחתו לא שעה"115 ולפרש "אל-ישעו" — אל יפנו. שאם כן, היה לו לכתב ואל ישעו אל-דברי שקר או לדברי שקר, כי כן גזרת בלם: "ישעה האדם על- עשהו"116. "ולא שעו על קדוש ישראל"117. "ולא ישעה אל-המזבחות"118. ולא מצאתי שמוש של ב"ת סמוכה לאחריהם. אבל אחר לשון דבור במתעסק לדבר בדבר, נופל לשון שמוש ב"ת, כגון: "הנדברים בך"119. "ותדבר מרים ואהרן במשה"120. "המלאך הדבר ב"121. "לדבר בם"122. "ואדברה בעדתיך"123. אף כאן, "אל- ישעו בדברי שקר" — אל יהיו נדברים בדברי שוא והבאי: 11 אתם לכו קחו לכם תבן. וצריכים אתם לילף בוריות, כי אין נגרע מעבודתכם דבר. מפל- סכום לבנים שהייתם עושים ליום, בהיות התבן נתן לכם מזמן מבית המלאך: 12 לקשש קש לתבן. לאסוף אספה, ללקט לקט לצרף תבן הטיט: קש. לשון לקוט, על שם שדבר המתפור הוא וצריך לקוששו, קרוי "קש" בשאר מקומות:

5 הן-רבים עתה עם-הארץ. שהעבודה מטלת עליהם, ואתם משביתים אותם מסבלותם, הפסד גדול הוא זה: 6 הנגשים. מצריים היו והשטרים היו ישראלים. הנוגש ממנה על כמה שוטרים, והשוטר ממנה לרדות בעושי המלאכה: 7 תבן. אשטובל"106, היו גובלין אותו עם הטיט: לבנים. טיול"ש בלעז"107, שעושים מטיט ומיבשין אותן בחמה, ויש ששורפין אותן בכבשן: בתמול שלשם. באשר הייתם עושים עד הנה: וקששו. ולקטו: 8 ואת-מתכנת הלבנים: סכום חשבון הלבנים שהיה כל-אחד עושה ליום, כשהיה התבן נתן להם, אותו סכום תשימו עליהם גם עתה, למען תכבד העבודה עליהם: כי-נרפים. מן העבודה הם, לכך לפם פונה אל הבטלה, וצועקים לאמר גלכה וגו': מתכנת. "ותכן לבנים"108, "ולו נתכנו עללות"109, "את-הכסף המתכן"110 — כלם לשון חשבון הם: נרפים. המלאכה רפויה בידם, ועיובה מהם, והם נרפים ממנה. ריטרייט בלעז"111: 9 ואל-ישעו בדברי-שקר. ואל יהגו וידברו תמיד בדברי רוח, לאמר גלכה נזבחה, ודומה לו: "ואשעה בחקיקי תמיד"112. "למשל ולשנינה"113

106. קש. 107. רעפים. 108. שמות ה, יח. 109. שמואלא ב, ג. 110. מלכים ב, יב. 111. המנעות. 112. תהלים קיט, קיז. 113. דברים כח, לו. 114. בראשית כד, סו. 115. שם ד, דה. 116. ישעיה יז, ז. 117. שם לא, א. 118. שם יח, ח. 119. יחזקאל לג, ל. 120. במדבר יב, א. 121. זכריה א, ט. זכריה ד, א. 122. דברים יא, יט. 123. תהלים קיט, מו.

5 Pharaoh thought: "If the Levites are so lazy that they consider their daily chores an oppressive burden, the same is probably true of the people as a whole." **Pharaoh continued, "The people of the land are now numerous, and you would have them cease from their work,** which they consider not just normal work but hard **labor!** You want them to take a vacation for three whole days? This will cause us a great loss in productivity!"

6 Pharaoh thought further: "If the people are so lazy and consider their daily workload so burdensome, they are probably not working up to par. We have to do something to make them work harder." So,²⁴⁷ **on that day, Pharaoh gave orders to the people's Egyptian taskmasters and Israelite foremen,**²⁴⁸ **as follows:**

7 **"You shall no longer provide the people with straw for making bricks as you did until now; let them go and gather their own straw.**

8 **However, you must impose upon them the same quota of bricks as they made until now. Do not reduce it. For they are evidently lazy; that is why they are crying out and saying, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God!'**

9 **Make the work heavier for the men and let them keep at it; then they will stop talking vain words."**

10 **The people's Egyptian taskmasters and Israelite foremen went out and told the people as follows, "This is what Pharaoh has said: 'I will no longer give you straw.**

11 **Therefore, you must quickly go and get your own straw wherever you can find it, because nothing has been reduced from your usual daily workload—**your quota remains unchanged.'" They did not, however, tell them why Pharaoh was no longer providing them with straw. Furthermore, they referred to the Israelites' tasks as their "(usual) workload" and not as their "(burdensome) labor" since they wanted to give the impression that the demands they were now making of them were not unusual or excessive.²⁴⁹

12 **So the people spread out over the entire land of Egypt to gather stubble for straw.**

❧ CHASIDIC INSIGHTS ❧

just as Pharaoh ruled the greatest civilization in his time, the Torah exhorts every Jew to consider himself the "ruler of the world," i.e., to accept responsibility for the destiny of all reality.²⁵⁰ In this context, we must look at ourselves and ask, "Am I being lazy? Do I consider my mission in this world my normal 'workload' or 'hard labor,' a 'chore?'" Furthermore, we must ensure that we fulfill our daily quota of accomplishment, relying neither on yesterday's laurels nor

tomorrow's opportunities.

How can we demand this of ourselves? When we avail ourselves of the "Moses and Aarons" of the generation that take us out of Egypt, out of our personal limitations. This is why the theme of the Exodus is incorporated in our daily prayers—to remind us daily that yesterday's accomplishments are today's Egypt, and we must always strive for greater accomplishments in the realm of holiness from day to day.²⁵¹

247. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, vol. 1, pp. 791-792. 248. See above, on 1:11. 249. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, vol. 1, pp. 791-792. 250. "Every person should say, 'the world was created for me'" (*Sanhedrin* 37a). 251. *Sichot Kodesh* 5740, p. 793.

ONKELOS

13 וְהַנָּגִישׁ אֲצִים לֵאמֹר כָּלֹּ מַעֲשֵׂיכֶם דְּבָרִים
בְּיוֹמוֹ כְּאֲשֶׁר בְּהִיּוֹת הַתֵּבָן: 14 וַיָּכּוּ שְׂטָרִי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
אֲשֶׁר־שָׁמוּ עֲלֵהֶם נִגְשֵׁי פֶרַעַה לֵאמֹר מַדּוּעַ לֹא כָלִיתֶם
חֲקֻכֶם לִלְבָּן כַּתְמוֹל שִׁלְשָׁם גַּם־תְּמוֹל גַּם־הַיּוֹם:
15 וַיָּבֹאוּ שְׂטָרִי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲקֹוּ אֶל־פֶּרַעַה
לֵאמֹר לָמָּה תַעֲשֶׂה כֹה לַעֲבָדֶיךָ: 16 תֵּבָן אֵין נִתָּן
לַעֲבָדֶיךָ וּלְבָנִים אֲמָרִים לָנוּ עֲשׂוּ וְהִנֵּה עֲבָדֶיךָ
מִפִּים וְחֲטָאת עֲמָךְ: 17 וַיֹּאמֶר נִרְפִּים אַתֶּם
נִרְפִּים עַל־כֵּן אַתֶּם אֲמָרִים נִלְכָּה נִזְבַּחַה לַיהוָה:
18 וְעַתָּה לָכוּ עֲבָדוּ וְתֵבָן לֹא־יִנָּתֵן לָכֶם וְתֵבָן לְבָנִים
תִּתֶנּוּ: 19 וַיֵּרְאוּ שְׂטָרִי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֹתָם בָּרַע לֵאמֹר
לֹא־תִגְרַעוּ מִלְּבָנֵיכֶם דְּבָרִים בְּיוֹמוֹ: 20 וַיִּפְגְּעוּ אֶת־
מִשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן נֹצְצִים לִקְרֹאתָם בְּצֹאתָם מֵאֶת
פֶּרַעַה: 21 וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם יֵרָא יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם וַיִּשְׁפֹּט
אֲשֶׁר הִבָּאִשְׁתֶּם אֶת־רִיחֵנוּ בְּעֵינֵי פֶרַעַה וּבְעֵינֵי עֲבָדָיו
לְתַת־חֶרֶב בְּיָדָם לְהַרְגֵנוּ:
מַפְטִיר 22 וַיָּשָׁב מִשֶּׁה אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי לָמָּה
הִרְעַתָּה לָעַם הַזֶּה לָמָּה זֶה שְׁלַחְתָּנִי:

RASHI

הַנָּגִישׁ הַכּוֹס: 16 וּלְבָנִים אֲמָרִים לָנוּ הַנָּגִישׁ עֲשׂוּ.
כַּמְנֵן הִרְאִישׁוֹן: וְחֲטָאת עֲמָךְ. אֵלֹו הָיָה נִקְוֶה פִּתְחָה,
הֵייתִי אֹמֶר שֶׁהוּא דְּבוּק — וְדָבָר זֶה חֲטָאת עֲמָךְ הוּא.
עֲכָשִׁיו שֶׁהוּא קָמָץ — שֶׁם דְּבָר הוּא, וְכָף פְּרוּשׁוֹ: וְדָבָר
זֶה מְבִיא חֲטָאת עַל עֲמָךְ, כְּאֵלֹו כְּתוּב 'וְחֲטָאת לַעֲמָךְ',
כְּמוֹ: "כְּבֹאֲנָה בֵּית לָחֶם"¹²⁵, שֶׁהוּא כְּמוֹ לְבֵית לָחֶם,
וְכֵן הִרְבֵּה: 18 וְתֵבָן לְבָנִים. חֲשׁוֹן הַלְּבָנִים, וְכֵן "אֶת־
הַכֶּסֶף הַמִּתְכַּן"¹²⁶ — הַמְּנוּי, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמַר בְּעֵינֵינוּ: "וַיִּצְרֻ
וַיִּמְנוּ אֶת־הַכֶּסֶף"¹²⁷: 19 וַיֵּרְאוּ שְׂטָרִי בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל. אֶת
חֲבֵרֵיהֶם הַנִּרְדִּים עַל יָדָם: בָּרַע. רָאוּ אוֹתָם בָּרַעַה וְצָרָה
הַמוֹצֵאת אוֹתָם, בְּהַכְּבִידָם הָעֲבֹדָה עֲלֵיהֶם "לֵאמֹר
לֹא תִגְרַעוּ" וגו': 20 וַיִּפְגְּעוּ. אֲנָשִׁים מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל "אֶת־
מִשֶּׁה וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן" וגו'. וְרַבּוֹתֵינוּ דְּרָשׁוּ: "כָּל "נֹצְצִים"
וְ"נֹצְצִים" — דָּתָן וְאַבִּירָם הָיוּ, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר בָּהֶם: "וַיִּצְאוּ
נֹצְצִים"¹²⁸: 22 לָמָּה הִרְעַתָּה לָעַם הַזֶּה. וְאֵם תֹּאמַר: מָה
אִכְפַּת לָךְ. קוֹבֵל אֲנִי עַל שֶׁשְׁלַחְתָּנִי:

124. במדבר יא, טו. 125. רות א, יט. 126. מלכים ב, יב. 127. שם, יא. 128. נדריס, סד, ב. 129. במדבר טו, כז.

13 The Egyptian taskmasters pressured them and said, “You must complete your daily quota of work, just as before, when straw was provided.”

14 But the Israelite foremen had pity on the people and did not urge them to meet their quota, so, after a few days, the foremen from among the Israelites, whom Pharaoh’s taskmasters had appointed over them, were flogged by the taskmasters. The foremen were told by the taskmasters, “Why did you not complete your former brick-making quota, neither yesterday nor today?”

15 The Israelites’ foremen came and cried out to Pharaoh, saying, “Why are you doing this to us, your servants?”

16 Your servants are not given any straw, yet the taskmasters tell us, ‘Make the same number of bricks as before!’ Your servants are being flogged unjustly, and the sin is therefore not ours but your people’s!”

17 He retorted, “Lazy, that’s what you are, lazy! That’s why you are saying, ‘Let us go and sacrifice to God.’”

18 Now go and get to work! You will not be given any straw, but you must deliver your quota of bricks!” The Egyptians now began to enforce the Jew’s quota of bricks so rigidly that if it was not fulfilled, they immured their children into the walls.²⁵²

19 The Israelites’ foremen saw their fellow Israelites in the painful predicament that resulted from the order they relayed: “You shall not reduce your daily quota of bricks.”

20 Dathan and Aviram encountered Moses and Aaron standing before them as they were leaving Pharaoh’s presence.

21 They said to them, “May God reveal Himself to you and judge you, for you have made us loathsome in the eyes of Pharaoh and his servants, providing them with a sword with which to kill us! Leave us alone and let us serve the Egyptians!”²⁵³

Moses Complains; God Rebukes

- ◆ **Maftir 22** Moses returned to God and said, “O God, why have You mistreated this people? Things have gotten so bad that the Egyptians are immuring the Israelites’ children in the buildings if they do not meet their daily quota of bricks! And why have You sent me?”

CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

22 Why have you mistreated this people? Although the forefathers suffered, they never questioned God’s justice. Moses, however, did. This is because the forefathers mainly related to God emotionally, while Moses related to God more intellectually. Although the

emotions—love, fear, mercy, etc.—can be guided by the intellect, they can also override it if they are strong enough. When one person loves another strongly, he can remain devoted to him even when doing so becomes illogical. Similarly, when we are emotionally

²⁵². Sanhedrin 111a; Tana d’vei Eliahu 7; Sefer HaYashar. ²⁵³. Rashi on 14:12, below.

— ONKELOS —

23 ומעבדן דעלית לות פרעה למללא בשמך אבאש לעמא הדין ושיזבא לא שיזבתא ית עמך: 6:1 ואמר יי למשה בען תחזי די אעבד לפרעה ארי בידא תקיפא ישלחנן ובידא תקיפא יתריכנן מארעה:

23 ומאז באתי אל־פרעה לדבר בשמך הרע לעם הזה והצל לא־הצלתי את־עמך: 6:1 ואמר יהוה אל־משה עתה תראה אשר אעשה לפרעה כי ביד חזקה ישלחם וביד חזקה יגרשם מארצו:

קב"ד פסוקים. ויק"ח סימן. מעד"י סימן.

— RASHI —

אמות כשאביאם לארץ: כי ביד חזקה ישלחם. מפני ידי החזקה שתחזק עלי, ישלחם: וביד חזקה יגרשם מארצו. על פרחם של ישראל יגרשם, ולא יספיקו לעשות להם צידה, וכן הוא אומר: "ותחזק מצרים על־העם למחר לשלחם וגו'":¹³² חסלת פרשת שמות

23 הרע. לשון הפעיל הוא — הרבה רעה עליהם. ותרגמו: "אבאש": 1 עתה תראה וגו'. הרבה על מדותי: לא כאברהם שאמרתי לו: "כי ביצחק יקרא לך ורע"¹³⁰, ואחר כך אמרתי לו: "העלהו לעלה"¹³¹, ולא הרהר אחרי מדתי. לפיכך "עתה תראה" — העשוי לפרעה תראה, ולא העשוי למלכי שבקה

130. בראשית כא, יב. 131. בראשית כב, ב. 132. שמות יב, לג.

— CHASIDIC INSIGHTS —

caring shepherd, concerned for every one in his flock. This trait enabled him to devote himself to teaching the Torah to the people, to help each individual reach the highest level of Divine consciousness he or she could.

This is why Moses addressed God as though he was indeed questioning His justice—even though in truth, he wasn't. By phrasing his question this way, Moses undertook to solidify the faith of even those Jews whose faith was so weak that they could question God's justice.

As we shall see,²⁶⁰ in response to Moses' question, to his desire to understand God's ways, God told him that the purpose of the exile was to enable the people to reach a higher level of Divine consciousness than they could by relying solely on their inheritance from the patriarchs.²⁶¹

1 God said to Moses: God's response to His justice being questioned was that Moses should have learned from the example of Abraham. Although all the pa-

triarchs had undergone tests of faith, the situations of Abraham and Moses were particularly analogous in that in both cases—

- ♦ God had promised something and then appeared to renege on His promise. After promising Abraham progeny through Isaac, He told him to slaughter him; after promising Moses that He would redeem the Jews, He sent him on a mission that only intensified their suffering. In each case, the promise raised the hopes of fulfillment; this made the pain of disillusionment all the more intense.
- ♦ The future of the entire Jewish people was at stake.

Therefore, Moses should have learned from Abraham's example in *this* case.

As stated above, Moses only *appeared* to question God's justice. The answer to Moses' real question—his plea to understand something of God's justice so his faith and the faith of the people could be internalized—comes at the beginning of the next *parashah*.²⁶²

259. On 3:1, above. 260. Below, on 6:3. 261. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 51. 262. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, p. 48.

23 For since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has made things worse for this people, and still You have not delivered Your people!"

6:1 God said to Moses, "Are you questioning my justice? The children that are being immured are only those who would have become consummately wicked had they lived, and in this way I am purifying the people of their immoral elements and saving these children from future punishment. If you wish, you may test Me in this: I will allow you to save one of them, and you will see what will happen." Moses went and saved a child named Micah, who in fact later played a key role in the sin of the Golden Calf.²⁵⁴ God continued: **"Now, because you questioned my justice, you will only see what I shall do to Pharaoh: that because of My strong hand he will send them forth, and indeed, he will be so anxious to send them forth that he will forcibly drive them out of his land even before they have prepared properly for their journey and are ready to go."**²⁵⁵ But I will not allow you to see Israel's victory over the kings of Canaan. You should have learned from Abraham: even though I promised him that he would father a nation through Isaac, when I told him to slaughter Isaac he did not question Me, even though My command seemed to contravene My promise."²⁵⁶

The Haftarah for parashat Shemot may be found on p. 301.



CHASIDIC INSIGHTS

bound to God, anomalies in His behavior toward us do not challenge our faith in Him.

Thus, even though the forefathers used their intellect to relate to God, their strong emotional ties with Him made any incongruities in His behavior toward them inconsequential. In contrast, although Moses also had emotional ties with God, the preeminence of his intellect made his people's suffering an issue that had to be resolved; until it was, he could not proceed in his Divine mission or progress in his relationship with God.

As we shall see, God's reply to Moses' question was that it was time for him to integrate the emotionalism of the forefathers into his relationship with God.²⁵⁷

On a deeper level, Moses was not casting any aspersions on God's justice, but was seeking to intellectually understand it. It was the same when he asked God what His Name is;²⁵⁸ he was not questioning God's justice, just asking to understand it.

Together with the rest of the Jewish people, Moses had inherited his faith in God from the patriarchs. This inherited faith was indeed very strong, as seen

from the fact that it withstood hundreds of years of exile and slavery. But in order to be redeemed from Egypt and receive the Torah, the people had to reach a still more profound level of faith. It was not enough for their relationship with God to be a cultural inheritance from their ancestors; they had to make it their own. For only when a person internalizes his faith and makes it his own can it permeate his whole being and inform all aspects of his life.

Ironically, the way we transform our inherited faith into our own possession is by *questioning* the faith bequeathed to us by our cultural heritage. Not through questioning out of doubt or for the sake of questioning, but in order to truly understand the underpinnings of this faith. If we neglect to do this and base our religiosity solely on our inherited faith, we are likely to eventually question this inherited faith out of doubt.

Moses embodied the quest to internalize faith, and this is what he sought to accomplish for the Jewish people. As we saw above,²⁵⁹ God selected Moses for the task of redeeming the people and transmitting the Torah to them because he had shown himself to be a

²⁵⁴. Below, 12:36 and 32:4; Rashi on *Sanhedrin* 101b. ²⁵⁵. See below, 12:31-33. ²⁵⁶. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 16, pp. 47-50. ²⁵⁷. *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 3, pp. 856-858. ²⁵⁸. Above, 3:13-15; see commentary *ad loc*.

