



Parshas Shemos 2020, the crisis of identity

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna, Shaul Ben Berta, and Lior Gabay Ben Michal.

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Leah Mintche Bas Ya'akov Yosef, Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted and their memories a blessing.

Our Parsha ends the story of the birth of a family and begins the story of the birth of a nation. The Torah starts by giving us context to the Jewish people's situation at that time.

Yosef and all his brothers had passed on, and the new king ignored Yosef and his accomplishments. As the Jewish people began to flourish and prosper, Pharaoh became fearful of their growing numbers and resolved to find a solution to his *"Jewish problem."*

His strategy was to burden the Jewish people with so much work that they would have no time to have more children. However, Hashem had a different plan for the Jewish nation, as the Pasuk says (1:12) *"As much as the Egyptians would afflict them, so did they multiply and grow in strength."*

Pharaoh then commanded that all the newborn baby boys were to be thrown into the Nile River. However, Moshe Rabbeinu was born prematurely after just 6 months of pregnancy.

So his mother could hide his existence for three months while she devised a plan to save him. After three months, she put Moshe in a waterproof basket and set him afloat on the Nile under the watchful eyes of his older sister, Miriam.

Pharaoh's daughter, Batya, was in the river when she heard Moshe's cries, so she stretched out her arm and took hold of the small basket. When she opened it and saw that there was a little baby boy.

Batya realized and understood that he was there because of her father's decree and decided to raise him as her own child. She gave him the name Moshe because she drew him from the water.

When Moshe grew up, he ventured out of the palace and saw the slavery that the Jewish people were going through. Once, Moshe saw an Egyptian slavemaster hitting a Jew and decided he could no longer stand as his brothers and sisters were suffering.

So, he said G-d's holy and secret 72-letter name, instantly killing the evil Egyptian. When Moshe's deed was told to Pharaoh, he fled to Midian to escape Pharaoh's punishment.

However, a question comes to mind: When Moshe ventured out of the palace, the Pasuk writes (2:11) *"he went to his brothers and saw their pain, then he witnessed an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers."* Why did the Torah, which is usually very clear and concise with its wording, write that Moshe went to his brothers and saw a brother getting hit? Why does the Pasuk mention the fact that they were his brothers two separate times?!

Furthermore, the Torah writes that Moshe grew up two times consecutively, first in the previous Pasuk (24:10) *"וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד - and the child grew up"*, and then in the next Pasuk as well (24:11) *"וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה - and Moshe grew up."* Why does the Torah mention that Moshe grew up two separate times?!

The Ohr Hachaim Hakadosh (*Rav Chaim Ibn Attar*) writes that the Torah mentions that they were his brothers because there were some righteous ones and some were not. The victim of this slavemaster was a righteous person who didn't deserve this beating.

Rashi explains that the Egyptian was hitting him because he discovered that the Egyptian was with his wife.

And in fact, we see that there was a child born from that union. As written in Parshas Behar (Vayikra 24:10) *“and a person who was the son of a Jewish woman but whose father was an Egyptian.”*

Rashi also explains that the Torah repeats the fact that Moshe grew up because it's talking about two different stages. The first talked about Moshe becoming a young man and maturing into adulthood.

The second talked about Moshe's growing stature and reputation within the palace. That even Pharaoh was impressed by Moshe's wisdom and appointed him the head of his court.

However, the Ibn Ezra (*the famous Spanish Rabbi, Avraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra*) gives a deeper and more powerful explanation. He writes that the Torah repeats that they were his brothers and that he grew up because Moshe had an identity crisis. **On the one hand, he was a powerful prince in Pharaoh's palace; on the other hand, he was a special young Jewish man from the tribe of Levi.**

The Ibn Ezra explains that when Moshe stepped out of the palace, he had two people he could relate to and identify with. He could have associated with the people in the palace he grew up in. But instead, Moshe identified with his brothers, the Jewish people.

But when he saw the Egyptian and the Jew together, he immediately emphasized and related to the Jewish person's plight. As the Pasuk says clearly (24:11) *“he went out to HIS brothers, he saw THEIR pain and saw an Egyptian hit a Hebrew man, one of HIS brothers.”*

The Ibn Ezra continues that this is why the Torah repeats that he grew up because the first time was growing up physically in age. But the second time was for growing up in his spirituality and making an unmistakable and definite choice about who he really is, a Jewish man from the tribe of Levi.

Now that Moshe decided, he could not stand by while his brothers were being oppressed. So when Moshe killed the Egyptian, he revealed the world with whom he identified.

But more importantly, he solidified his decision internally with an action from which there was no turning back.

We can not stand by in our daily lives while our brothers and sisters are in pain and suffering. Instead, we must do all we can to help them. Whether we use our money or resources to help, being on the sidelines should not be an option.

It is imperative to remember that since we have a piece of G-d within us, we are all inherently connected. Therefore, the suffering of one person is the pain of all, and we should all be within our power to assist and support those who need it.

These actions do not only benefit those who receive assistance but instead, but they also bring them closer to the ultimate redemption.

“There is no better exercise for your heart than reaching down and helping to lift someone up.”

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*