



Parshas Shemos 2021, the sound of silence

This week's Parsha Perspective is in loving memory of Silvia Bas Herschel, Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. And in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna, Shaul Ben Berta, Michaela Bas Noga, and Noga Bas Nava.

Our Parsha ends the origins of a family and begins 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 Pharaoh forgot Yosef and all his accomplishments.

I focused on Moshe's birth and childhood in the past three episodes on Parshas Shemos. But this episode will spotlight Moshe's adulthood and the events that occurred then; you can listen to, watch, and read the past episodes on Parshaperspective.com.

After growing up in the palace, Moshe ventured out of the royal residences and saw the slavery of the Jewish people. Moshe saw an Egyptian slavemaster hitting a Jew and decided he could no longer stand as his brothers and sisters were suffering. Moshe said G-d's holy and secret 72-letter name, instantly killing the evil Egyptian. Moshe's actions were told to Pharaoh, so he fled to the country of Midian to escape Pharaoh's punishment.

When he arrived, he went to the city well and met the seven daughters of Yisro, the priest of Midian. After Moshe helped them draw water for their animals, the sisters returned home and told their father what had happened. Yisro then invited Moshe to eat and stay at his home. Moshe married Yisro's oldest daughter, Tizpporah, and became the shepherd for all Yisro's animals.

Once, while herding the animals, Moshe came across a burning bush; G-d called out to him as he stepped closer. G-d said, do not come closer and take off your shoes, for you are standing on holy ground. He told Moshe that He heard the cries of the Jewish people and wanted Moshe to lead them out of Egypt.

Moshe objected and argued that he had a lisp and could not adequately represent G-d's holy words. G-d responded (3:11) "*who gives a person a mouth or who makes him a mute, deaf or blind, is it not I, your G-d.*" Although Moshe tried not to accept this vital mission, he gathered his wife and children and headed to Egypt.

However, a question comes to mind: When Moshe became the shepherd for his father-in-law, the Torah writes (3:1), "*He led the sheep after the desert, and he came to the mountain of G-d, Horeb.*" Why does the Torah write "*after the desert*" when it could have written, "*he led the sheep to the mountain of G-d, Horeb*"? What does "**after the desert**" add to the story?

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) answers this question by explaining the normal behavior of shepherds. He quotes the Midrash Rabbah (2:3) that cautions against using shepherds as witnesses since they allow their flocks to graze on other people's land. But Moshe would not allow his animals to pasture on property that was not his. Hence, he led his sheep to graze on ownerless land deep in the wilderness.

The Torah specifies this seemingly minor detail to teach us how holy, unique, and special Moshe Rabbeinu was. He was uncommonly pious even before G-d revealed Himself and told him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt. He was a faithful and trustworthy shepherd in all aspects of his life.

However, the Abarbanel (*Rav Yitzchak Ben Yeudah Abarbanel, a 14th-century Spanish commentary*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. He writes that guiding and leading animals provides the shepherd with a lot of time for self-reflection, enabling them to obtain an intense connection to G-d.

We see that many holy people were shepherds, such as Avraham, Yitzchak, Ya'akov, and his twelve sons, Moshe and David Hamelch.

The Abarbanel explains that shepherds had a deep connection to G-d due to their spare time and because they were alone. This combination of independence and self-reflection enabled them to be extremely sensitive to the holiness hiding just beneath the surface. To see and recognize how G-d is indeed running the world. This is why the Torah adds *"after the desert,"* for Moshe went on an extended journey to find himself and G-d.

The Abarbanel continues that the solitude and silence made Moshe hypersensitive to G-d's holiness. The Torah writes that Moshe did a double-take when he saw the fiery bush not being burnt. He knew that there was a deeper meaning to this weird and strange phenomenon that he wanted to investigate. Only after he came close did G-d reveal himself to Moshe, as the Pasuk details (3:4) *"And G-d saw that he had turned to see, and G-d called to him from within the bush, "Moshe, Moshe!" And he responded, "Here I am!"*

We see a similar lesson being taught to Eliyahu HaNavi when he desperately searched for G-d. (Malachim 1, 19:12) *"After the earthquake, there was a fire; but G-d was not in the fire. But after the fire, a soft murmuring sound."* Not in the fire and fury will Eliyahu find G-d, **but in the deep silence of his heart – where he finds his true self.**

Moshe's curiosity and sensitivity developed by being in the silence of nature made G-d finalize His choice of who was to lead the Jewish out of Egypt.

In our daily life, it is important to realize that when we check our phone for the umpteenth time, we are actually looking for a distraction to fill our time. We are either unable or unwilling to be alone with our thoughts and the feelings of our hearts. Yet, many studies show the benefits of being in silence; we sleep and rest easier and become more self-aware. We become increasingly creative, inventive, and most importantly, holy and spiritual.

"In the silence behind what can be heard lies the answers we have been searching for for so long."

*Have a meaningful Shabbos,
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*