

Parshas Shemos

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1. How Does One Experience Exile?

The Torah states, **“V’eileh shemos...And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt...”** The verse begins with the letter “vav – (which means “and”). This signifies that it is coming to include or continue what was discussed previously in the Torah. Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains in his commentary that just as Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov were interested in the process of exile (*golus*) to atone for sin, so too Yaakov and his family went to Egypt to complete the atonement process (through exile.)

The Gemara in Tractate Niddarim explains that the reason the Jewish people needed to go into exile in Egypt was to atone and correct a failing of Avraham our Patriarch. The Gemara offers three possible reasons atonement was needed. The first opinion states that when Avraham was told by G’d that he and his offspring would inherit the land of Canaan, he asked Hashem, **“How shall I know that I am to inherit it (the land of Canaan)?”** This question was considered a lack of faith. If G’d had promised Avraham that the land was to be unconditionally his and his progeny’s there was no basis to ask this question. The Jewish people needed to go into exile in order to atone for this failing. As it is stated in the verse, **“Know with certainty that your offspring shall be strangers in a land not their own – and they will serve them....”** It is because of this lack of faith that the Jewish people needed to go to Egypt.

The second opinion offered by the Gemara as to why the Jewish people needed to go into exile was to atone and correct for the sin that Avraham had interrupted the Torah scholars from their studies in order to assist him to rescue his nephew Lot. Lot had been taken captive by the Four Kings who had defeated the Five Kings.

The third opinion is that after Avraham had defeated the Four Kings and rescued his nephew Lot, he had the opportunity to take the members of the community of Sodom, who were pagans, and convert them to monotheism. Avraham did not take advantage of this opportunity. It was because he had failed that the Jewish people needed to go into exile.

When Yaakov and his family went to Egypt, they understood that the reason for their descent was to affect a spiritual correction. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the letter “vav(and)” at the beginning of the Portion of Shemos is coming to indicate that the actions of Yaakov and his children are a continuation of the atonement process – namely being strangers in a land that was not theirs. They knowingly went to Egypt, despite the eventual bondage and suffering that would ensue, only to affect the spiritual changes needed for the Jewish people. The Egyptian exile is referred to by the Torah as “the iron smelter.”

The Midrash tells us that initially Esav wished to inherit Canaan; however, when he was informed that if he were to receive the land of Canaan he and his offspring would need to pay the spiritual debt incurred by Avraham. Meaning that he and his descendants would eventually need to experience exile. Understanding this, Esav chose to relinquish his claim to the land of Canaan and take for himself Mt. Seir, the land of the Edomites. Yaakov on the other hand was willing to inherit the land of Canaan despite the spiritual debt that would have to be paid– thus committing to a future of exile in Egypt. Why was Yaakov and his children prepared to do this when Esav was not?

The Midrash tells us that when Esav was born he had a ruddy complexion and his father Yitzchak was concerned that his complexion was an indication that his blood had not yet clotted. Thus, Yitzchak chose not to circumcise him because he would bleed to death. However, after some time had passed, Yitzchak understood that this was not the case but rather that it was simply Esav's complexion. Nevertheless Esav refused to be circumcised. In contrast, Yaakov was born circumcised. What is the effect of circumcision?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that as a result of Adam partaking of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, he introduced into himself a spiritual impurity. This impurity manifested itself within Adam's physical existence as a foreskin which covered his genital. Adam was created as being without a foreskin, indicating that the foreskin is only an outgrowth of the impurity brought upon him by the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. G'd gave Avraham our Patriarch the mitzvah of circumcision in order to correct and effect this impurity to give him and his descendents a potential to develop their spirituality. If a non-Jew were to remove his foreskin it would not have the same effect because only Avraham and his descendents have relevance to spiritual growth.

Esav initially had relevance to this spiritual correction because he was the son of Yitzchak. However, he chose to have no part of it. In effect, Esav was denying himself circumcision because he was denying and rejecting his spiritual essence. He believed that a man's essence was physical and not spiritual. In fact the Torah identifies Esav as "the man of the field" – indicating his affinity to earthiness and physicality. Yaakov on the other hand was "the man who dwelt in the tent (of Torah)." He lived his life as a spiritual being. With this we can understand why Esav chose to relinquish the right to the land of Canaan and thus not endure the exile to bring about the spiritual correction and refinement. Yaakov and his family, because of their appreciation of their spiritual essence, recognized and appreciated the value of the land and were willing to experience the exile- despite its cost.

It is interesting to note, as the Midrash tells us, that the physical enslavement/bondage in Egypt only began after the Jewish people stopped circumcising themselves. Had the Jewish people continued to circumcise themselves and acknowledge their essence as spiritual beings, they would not have been subjected to physical bondage in Egypt. How do we understand this?

If the Jew in Egypt understood that he had no relevance to the Egyptian culture and people because of his spiritual essence, then the suffering of the exile would have been experienced through being exposed to an environment that was contrary to his essence. However, when the Jew identified with the Egyptian and established a commonality with him, by choosing not to be circumcised, then experiencing Egypt alone did not bring about any level of suffering (which was needed for atonement). Thus, the physical bondage was imposed upon the Jewish people so that they should experience exile through their physicality.

We are currently experiencing the exile of Edom. If the Jew does not sense and experience the pain of his spiritual displacement in exile, then (G'd forbid) it may be necessary to experience the exile through other forms of suffering. It is only when the Jew recognizes and feels that he does not belong, that the exile itself provides atonement and spiritual correction. However, if the Jew feels comfortable and values his predicament in the displaced location, then it is an indication that he does not appreciate his spirituality sufficiently and thus requires a degree of physical suffering and displacement to bring about atonement.

During the time of Chasam Sofer z'tl Napoleon had destroyed the city of Pressburg, which was the jewel city of Czechoslovakia. Pressburg had a large and flourishing Jewish community. After the defeat of Napoleon, the Jewish community of Pressburg rebuilt the city, the synagogues, and the Torah centers. To celebrate the rebuilding of the community and all of its institutions thanks and praise were offered to Hashem for allowing them to rebuild what was destroyed. At that event the Chasam Sofer broke down and cried profusely. He explained to the community that initially when Pressburg was destroyed by Napoleon, he believed that Moshiach was at hand. The Jewish people would soon be taken out of exile and brought back to the Land of Israel. However, now that Hashem allowed Pressburg to be rebuilt in a way that it could stand for hundreds of years, it was only an indication to him that the exile would be experienced for an extended period of time.

It is only when the Jew understands that his proper place is not in his location of exile, despite the comfort and the equality which he may experience there, then the exile has spiritual value. However, if exile is not experienced in this manner, then G'd forbid Hashem may cause the Jew to experience the exile through physical suffering and discrimination in order for him to attain atonement.

2. Moshe – the Redeemer

The Torah states, **“A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi. The woman conceived and gave birth to a son...”** The Torah does not identify the “man” mentioned in the verse as Amram, the father of Moshe Rabbeinu. The Torah also does not identify the “daughter of Levi” as Yocheved who was the mother of Moshe. Why does the Torah conceal the identity of Moshe’s parents?

Maharal of Prague z'tl in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that most often a child’s ability is determined by the characteristics that are passed down to him by his parents. By concealing the names of Moshe’s father and mother, the Torah is telling us that his dimension of person was unrelated to the characteristics and genealogy, which his parents possessed. Although Amram and Yocheved were very special in their own right, who thus merited having a son such as Moshe Rabbeinu, they nevertheless did not contribute to his special dimension of person. Moshe was a unique and miraculous child with abilities that surpassed every human capacity. Thus the Torah only identifies his parents as: **“A man went from the house of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi.”**

The Torah tells us that Shifrah (Yocheved) and Puah (Miriam) were the head midwives who oversaw the delivery of all Jewish children. Yocheved was called Shifrah because her role, as a midwife, was to clean and beautify the newborn children. Miriam was called Puah because she was the one who pacified the newborns. Why is it so important for the Torah to identify Yocheved and Miriam by their specific roles as midwives? Why does the Torah not identify them as Yocheved and Miriam?

It is interesting to note that the name used by the Torah to identify Moshe was not given to him by his parents; but rather, the daughter of Pharaoh. The Torah tells us that when the daughter of Pharaoh noticed a box floating in the Nile, she retrieved it and found

within it a Jewish child. She thus named him “Moshe” because he was “drawn from the water.” The Midrash tells us that Moshe was given seven names by his parents (Tov, Tuvia, Tuvi, Avigdor, etc.). Why does the Torah only refer to Moshe by the name given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh and not by any of the names given to him by his parents?

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah tells us that when daughter of Pharaoh went to bathe in the Nile she actually went immerse herself for the sake of conversion. As the Gemara states, “she went to cleanse herself from the idolatry of her father.” It was at that moment that she noticed a floating box, which contained Moshe. Evidently the daughter of Pharaoh was an exceptional individual. Despite her pagan surroundings and upbringing, she was able to see the truth – that G’d is the Omnipotent Being. The Gemara tells us that after she converted she was called “Bisya – Bas Ka”, which means “the daughter of G’d.” The daughter of Pharaoh had a level of clarity and understanding to be able to identify and appreciate something for what it was. Thus, when she named the child “Moshe” it must have been because she identified his essence as such. How do we understand this?

Sforno explains, “The daughter of Pharaoh called him Moshe because she understood from the circumstance in which he was found, that Moshe was destined to be a person to save others. When she saw him floating in the water it was obvious to her that he should have not survived. He should have drowned. The reason that he miraculously survived was because it was the Dictate of G’d that he should live because he was destined to save others.” Thus the appellation of “Moshe” identifies his essence as the Redeemer. He is the one who would ultimately receive the Torah at Sinai and give meaning and purpose to all existence. The daughter of Pharaoh recognized this.

Moshe Rabbeinu lived his life selflessly for G’d. Moshe’s greatness is attributed by the Torah to the fact that he was the most humble man who ever lived. He is the one who had said, “What are we?” This was an expression of his total negation. He lived his life without any degree of conflict of interest. Thus, his focus was only to live for others. As the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of Our Fathers) tells us, “If you had studied a great amount of Torah, do not pride yourself in it because it is for that reason that you were created.” Moshe lived every moment of his life as one who fully understood the purpose of his existence.

With this we are able to understand why Yocheved merited having such as special child as Moshe Rabbeinu. It was because of her own self-sacrifice and negation as the Jewish midwife who defied the Pharaoh at the risk of her own life. She thus merited having Moshe, who was that type of person, because she was “the Shifrah/midwife” and not because she was “Yocheved”- the mother of Moshe. It was only because she was Shifrah that she merited having the one who was drawn from the water to be the Redeemer.

3. Love of Your Fellow man is the Determining Factor

The Torah states at the beginning of the Sefer Shemos, “**Yosef died, and all his brothers and that entire generation. The Children of Yisroel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them. A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef. He said to his people, “Behold! The people, the Children of Yisroel, are more numerous and stronger than we. Come, let us outsmart it lest it become numerous and it may be that if a war will occur, it too may join our enemies, and wage war against us...”** Rashi cites the

argument between Rav and Shmuel as to whether or not the “new king” in Egypt was the same Pharaoh who knew Yosef, but who instituted a new mandate and acted as if he did not know him. Or, in fact, the Pharaoh was indeed a “new king” who did not know Yosef. In any case, this Pharaoh told his people that they must be “wisened” to the Jewish people because they had become numerous and that they may join with its enemies against Egypt.

It is difficult to understand how Pharaoh or the Egyptian people would actually believe this. It was Yosef, the Viceroy, who actually saved Egypt from extinction during the time of the great famine. It was Yosef’s plan and control over the grain that caused Egypt to become the wealthiest nation in the world because everyone turned to Egypt to purchase grain. The Nile would rise in the presence of the Pharaoh only because of the special blessing given to him by Yaakov. After all of the contributions Yaakov and Yosef made to Egypt how is it possible that Pharaoh would make a decree against the Jewish people and suspect that the same people who saved Egypt would join with its enemies against it?

There is a Positive Commandment in the Torah that one must love his fellow as he loves himself. The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLoshon* (Guarding One’s Tongue), that if one truly loved his fellow man, he would not speak negatively about him. In addition, there is a mitzvah to give someone the benefit of the doubt. If a Jew truly loved another Jew, he would try in every possible way to put him in the most positive light. If one speaks negatively about his fellow Jew or does not give him the benefit of the doubt, it is a clear indication that he does not love him as he loves himself. All difficulties between man and man stem from the failure to observe this Positive Commandment.

Given everything that Yosef and his family had done for Egypt, one would expect that the Egyptians would be beholden and have an exceptional love for the Jewish people. The fact that Pharaoh and the Egyptian people could suspect the Jews would join their enemies is only an indication that they truly lacked the proper love and appreciation for the Jewish people. The Egyptians did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jews had done for them. We see that this is inherent in the character of the Egyptian.

After Yosef had interpreted the dream of the wine steward while in prison, the man was subsequently released. Yosef had asked that he “remember” him and “mention” him to Pharaoh so that he too would be released from prison. The Torah tells us that the moment the wine steward was released, “he forgot Yosef.” Rashi cites the verse in *Tehillim* (Psalms) which states, “Fortunate is the man who puts his faith in Hashem and does not turn to the arrogant.” The Midrash explains that “the arrogant” is referring to the Egyptian. The Egyptian does not have the capacity to appreciate the kindness that was done to him and thus cannot be relied upon to reciprocate.

Even if the Pharaoh was truly a “new king” who did not personally know Yosef, there is no way that he could have ignored the historical recording that Yosef and Yaakov had saved Egypt. Again, it is obvious that he did not have the capacity to appreciate what the Jewish people had done for Egypt. Thus, he was able to enact new and harsh decrees against the Jews and impose upon them an overbearing bondage.

The reason a person chooses to behave as a rasha (evil person) is that he does not appreciate the goodness that is bestowed upon him by Hashem. If one truly appreciated that he was the beneficiary of G’d’s Kindness, he would be completely beholden and would behave differently. If Hashem continuously provides us with life and all other

amenities, then how is it possible to have difficulty in carrying out His Will? It is only due to a lack of appreciation that causes one to fall short of serving Hashem selflessly.

4. What Guarantees the Survival of the Jewish People?

The Torah tells us that after Yosef and that entire generation passed away, the Jewish people “were fruitful, teemed (*va’yishretzu*), increased and became strong.” The Torah continues to tell us that a new king arose over Egypt who did not know Yosef. The increase of the number of Jews in a short period caused Pharaoh to be concerned that they may align with Egypt’s enemies and drive them from the land. On a literal level, we could see that what fueled Pharaoh’s concern was the increase in the number of Jews in the land. However, we can understand it differently.

The extreme change in the status of the Jewish people only occurred after Yosef and that entire generation passed away. The Torah tells us that seemingly it was only after the Jews began *va’yishretzu* (teeming) that Pharaoh became concerned.

We find that after Yosef was sold into slavery and ultimately was purchased by Potiphar, he quickly ascended to become the head of his master’s household. At that time, the Torah states, “**Now Yosef was handsome of form and handsome of appearance. After these things, his master’s wife cast her eyes upon Yosef and she said, “Lie with me.”** Simply one could say that the reason his mistress took notice of him was his beauty and handsome appearance. However, Rashi explains it differently based on the Midrash. The Midrash says that when Yosef became the head of his master’s household he began to focus on his looks by beautifying his eyes and grooming his hair. Chazal tell us that Hashem said that Yosef’s behavior at that moment was inappropriate because he was paying attention to his beauty when his father Yaakov was grieving over his loss. Hashem said, “Because you were insensitive to your father’s pain, I will set your master’s wife upon you.” The Torah is telling us that if it were not for the inappropriateness of Yosef’s behavior (despite his beauty), his mistress would not have taken any interest in him. It was only because of his spiritual failing that Hashem allowed her to take notice.

In a similar vein, one can now understand Pharaoh’s concern with the increase in the Jewish population. Pharaoh had a sense of insecurity because Hashem *allowed* him to perceive the Jewish people in a suspicious manner.

Sforno explains “*va’yishretzu*” to mean that after the generation of Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people began to behave inappropriately – similar to rodents (pejorative term for improper behavior). The Midrash tells us that the bondage of the Jewish people started only after they stopped circumcising themselves. As long as the Jewish people circumcised themselves, they were not subject to slavery. However, when the generation of Yosef passed away, the Jewish people in Egypt no longer wished to value their spirituality, which is represented through the circumcision (sign of the Holy Covenant). It was at this time that they were subjected to bondage.

Under normal circumstances, Pharaoh would not have felt threatened by the sudden increase in the Jewish population. However, because the Jews began to abandon their spirituality, Pharaoh began to take notice. The justification for Pharaoh’s behavior was that the spirituality of the Jew had eroded to such a degree that he no longer identified them with their forbearers. Because Pharaoh could no longer recognize the spiritual influence of Yosef and that generation, he was able to justify the bondage.

The Gemara in Tractate Chulin says that the only time an animal attacks a human

being is when the animal sees the person as an animal (commonality with itself). However as long as the animal is able to sense the “tzelem Elokeem – the Image of G’d” (the spirituality) of the person, the animal will not attack. It is only when the human being is put on the same level as the animal that he will be subject to attack.

Similarly, the non-Jew becomes insecure when he perceives the Jew on his level. If the Jew retains his spirituality, then he does not have commonality with the non-Jew and therefore Hashem will not allow him to be despised. However, if the Jew should abandon his Judaism and attempt to assimilate with the non-Jew (even culturally), he will eventually become despised and rejected by the non-Jew. This is why Pharaoh became concerned with the increase in the Jewish population and thus instituted the bondage to subordinate and control the Jew. This unfortunate reality has repeated itself many times throughout history.

5. Understanding One’s Basic Purpose

The Torah tells us that Pharaoh decreed that all the Jewish newborn males should be thrown into the Nile. When Moshe was born, his mother Yocheved hid him until she could no longer conceal her son. In an attempt to save him from the Egyptians, the Torah states, “...**she (Yocheved) took for him (Moshe) a box fashioned of balsa wood *gomeh* and smeared it with clay and pitch; she placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the River.**”

It is interesting to note that the Torah is very specific about the material from which the box was made. Regarding Noach, the Torah tells us specifically that gopher wood was used to build the Ark. Rashi cites Chazal that the reason the Torah tells us this is that it is an allusion to the fact that the world will be destroyed by the sulfuric (*gufris*) water. However, regarding Moshe’s box, what is the significance of identifying the material from which it is made?

There is an opinion cited in the Midrash (which is the opinion of Reb Elazar) who explains that the reason the Torah specifies the wood of the box is to tell us that it is of inferior quality. This teaches us that a tzaddik values his money to a great degree. Yocheved chose to purchase the most inferior quality wood because of the degree to which she valued Hashem’s blessing, i.e. her personal assets. How do we understand this? How is it possible that she was concerned with cost of the wood when it was a question of saving the life of her child?

Yocheved was convinced that Moshe would survive the water regardless of the quality of the wood that was used, since he was to be the Redeemer of Israel. Miriam, Moshe’s sister, had shared a prophecy with her father that Yocheved would give birth to the Redeemer. In addition, Chazal tell us that when Moshe was born, the house was illuminated by his presence and he was able to speak although he was only a newborn. It was evident to his parents that he was destined to be The Redeemer.

Yocheved understood that Moshe would have survived even if she had placed him directly into the water because she knew that Hashem would perform the miracle necessary to ensure Moshe’s survival. If this is the case, then why place Moshe in a box at all, regardless of its minimal cost?

Noach did not necessarily need to build an ark to survive the Great Flood because Hashem could have performed a miracle by suspending him and all the other creatures above the waters. Ramban explains, the reason Noach was instructed to build an ark was

so that Hashem could bring about the miracle of his survival (and all that had accompanied him) in a concealed manner. If all of existence had survived through a revealed miracle, it would have been difficult to deny G'd's existence and thus free choice would have been diminished.

Yocheved understood that she had to conceal the miracle of Moshe's survival. Thus, it was necessary to fashion a box in order to cloak the miracle. Therefore, inferior wood was sufficient and spending more than what was absolutely necessary would have been considered wasteful. The Torah tells us that the basket was made of *gomeh* in order to inform us that Yocheved was aware of the destiny of her child.

From the time of his birth, Moshe understood that he was the Redeemer. The Torah tells us that when Moshe became an adult in the house of Pharaoh, he went out of the palace to see the suffering of his brothers (the Jewish people) and he came upon an Egyptian beating a Jew. Moshe first looked around, then killed the Egyptian and buried him in the sand. The reason Moshe killed the Egyptian was because he had raped the wife of the Jew who he was beating. How could Moshe kill the Egyptian without taking into consideration the consequences of his actions? If it were found out that he had killed the Egyptian, he would be forced to flee Egypt or even be killed. Moshe knew that the Egyptians could not kill him. He knew that Hashem would protect him because he was destined to take the Jewish people out of Egypt.

The fact is, unlike Moshe, most people do not know their mission in life. Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) says in "Koheles" that the day of one's death is greater than the day of one's birth. This is because when one dies, his life has shown its purpose (if he has succeeded). However, at the time of birth, one does not know how life will evolve and unfold. Although one's future is unknown because the course of our lives is dictated by our free choice, we do know that there is a baseline within which every Jew must operate. Regardless of who we are as individuals, we know that we are all obligated in the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvos. The Torah establishes the guidelines for every aspect of our lives and in that respect we know who we are as Moshe understood who he was. Therefore, we too should not compromise in our behavior.

6. Greatness Lies in What is not Obvious

The Torah states, **"The minister of Midian (Yisro) had seven daughters; they came and drew water and filled the troughs to water their father's sheep. The shepherds came and drove them away. Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep. They came to Reuel (Yisro) their father. He said, "How could you come so quickly today?" They replied, "An Egyptian man saved us from the shepherds, and he even drew water for us and watered the sheep." He said to his daughters, "Then where is he? Why did you leave the man? Summon him and let him eat bread!"** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that when Yisro said, "let him eat bread" he meant that Moshe should be considered as a candidate for marriage to one of his daughters. Why did Yisro feel that Moshe was worthy to be a prospective husband for one of his daughters? Were there no other available men for marriage in the Midian community?

Yisro, the sheik of Midian, was not a person of ordinary ability. He was an individual with exceptional understanding and ability and was therefore sensitive to many events and issues that most were not. As we see, Yisro heard (as the entire world had) that G'd had taken the Jewish people out of Egypt. Yisro was affected by this information differently than the rest of the world. He was compelled to leave his glory to join the

Jewish people in the desert. When Yisro heard what “the Egyptian man” (Moshe) had done for his daughters he immediately appreciated the how special he was. He understood that the man was a person of unique character.

Although Moshe went out of his way to assist Yisro’s daughters, he nevertheless did not seek any remuneration or acknowledgement. This level of behavior was something out of the ordinary. Under normal circumstances, the individual who offered this level of assistance would have returned with the daughters so their family would understand and appreciate what he had done for them. Even though he put his life in jeopardy when fending off the attackers and subsequently watered Yisro’s flocks, he walked away without any interest in acknowledgement. Yisro, being a highly astute individual, immediately recognized Moshe’s unequalled quality of person. He therefore asked his daughters, “why did you not bring him back?” – he was a qualified husband for one of them.

The Midrash Tanchuma states, “Hashem does not give greatness to a person unless he has been checked and tested in an insignificant area. It is only then that Hashem causes him to ascend to greatness.” The Midrash gives the example of two world-renown individuals: Dovid HaMelech (King David) and Moshe Rabbeinu. Dovid as a shepherd would take his flock into the desert to graze, because he was concerned that if they would graze closer to the community they may graze on lands that were not his and thus he would be in violation of stealing. Even if Dovid had not taken his flock into the desert, he would have been careful and vigilant not to allow them to graze in a location that was not his. Nevertheless, Dovid conducted himself in a manner that was above reproach. Even if it were remotely possible for the sheep to steal, this was not acceptable to him. Therefore, Dovid was chosen to be the king of Israel. The Midrash is teaching us that through one’s actions, which seem to be insignificant, one is chosen for greatness by Hashem.

Similarly, Moshe also led the flocks of his father-in-law into the desert to graze out of the same concern. Hashem said to Moshe, “Since you were so faithful in your responsibility to your flock, because you wanted your behavior to be above reproach, you shall lead My flock (the Jewish people).”

Yisro understood from something that seemed to be unnoticed and insignificant to others, that Moshe was a person who was very special and unique. It is through one’s behavior that is normally unnoticed that one reveals his true character.

The Gemara in Tractate Shevuos tells us that a judge must value a case that is worth one cent as much as another case worth an enormous amount of money. The judge is not permitted to even switch the order of adjudicating the case of minimal value with the case of greater monetary value. The Gemara tells us that both cases are of equal importance. Thus, the judge must be a person of such caliber that he does not differentiate between the inconsequential amount of money (the penny) and an enormous amount of money.

In order to recognize a special individual, one needs to be special himself. When Reb Yisroel Salanter z’tl was a mere youth of seventeen years, he recognized the greatness of a certain individual in his community who was working in a distillery. By the age of ten, Reb Yisroel Salanter was proficient in the entire Talmud. At the age of seventeen, he was already recognized as a great Torah mind. Reb Yisroel Salanter approached this individual on his way to the distillery and asked him to become his rebbe (teacher). The individual replied, “I am no more than a laborer in a distillery. Why would you think that I am qualified to be your rebbe?” Reb Yisroel replied, “I have noticed the

manner in which you conduct yourself during the Morning Service. Every aspect of your conduct during the service adheres meticulously to the various opinions of the Halachic Decisors (poskim). Your behavior is one of a kind and therefore it indicates to me that you are a hidden Torah Sage.” This was Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant z’tl, one of the leading Torah Sages of that generation. Reb Yisroel Salanter was able to perceive and recognize what others could not. Because he himself was special, he was able to identify his rebbe Reb Yosef Zundel of Salant.

We can see that the true greatness of an individual is revealed in the way one conducts himself in areas that are unnoticed by others.

7. *The Value of Going Unnoticed* (from *Vayechi*)

The Torah tells us that Yosef had taken his sons Ephraim and Menasheh to Yaakov (Yisroel) in order to receive a blessing. And Yisroel said to Ephraim and Menasheh, **”May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Avraham and Yitzhak, and may they reproduce (*vayidgu*) abundantly like fish within the land.”** The Torah could have used the word “*vayirbu*” which simply means “multiply/increase”; however, Yaakov used the word “*vayidgu*” instead to indicate their offspring should multiply like fish. What is the significance of this?

Rashi cites Chazal who explain the significance of the word “*vayidgu*” – “Ephraim and Menasheh should be as prolific as fish. Secondly, they should not be susceptible to the *ayin ha’rah* (evil eye) just as fish are concealed from the eye.” The Gemara tells us that Reb Yochanan was a man of great beauty. He would sit at the gates of the mikvah so that the women, who immersed themselves, should gaze at his beauty – causing them to conceive beautiful children. A colleague had asked Reb Yochanan, “Are you not concerned about the *ayin ha’rah* (evil eye)” Reb Yochanan responded, “I am not concerned because I descend from the progeny of Yosef who are not susceptible to the evil eye.”

Before Yaakov our Patriarch passed away, he blessed all twelve of his sons. Part of the blessing that he had given Yosef was that he should not be susceptible to the human eye (evil eye) “*aleiy ayin- (transcending the eye).*” Yosef himself, as the son of Yaakov was divided into two Tribes. As Yaakov had said, “Ephraim and Menasheh should be to me as Reuven and Shimon.” Since Ephraim and Menasheh had already received the blessing that they should possess the characteristic of fish – not to be not to the human eye, seemingly Yaakov’s blessing to Yosef of “*aleiy ayin*” is superfluous. How do we understand the value of the additional blessing that was bestowed upon Yosef?

One possible approach is similar to what Sforno had said regarding the blessing that Yitzhak, our Patriarch had wanted to give to Esav before his passing. Sforno explains that the impact of a blessing before one passes away has greater value because, although one is still alive, the neshamah (soul) of the individual has already detached itself from the body – in preparation for death. Because the blessing emanates from a more spiritual source (not being enmeshed with the physicality of the person) it is thus more profound.

When Yaakov initially blessed Ephraim and Menasheh, the Torah tells us that he was “ill.” It was not at the point, immediately before his passing. It was at that time that he blessed them not to be susceptible to the *ayin ha’rah*. However, later, immediately before his passing, the blessing that was repeated to Yosef was more profound because it emanated from his *neshamah* (soul) before it departed from his body. The second blessing of “*aleiy ayin*” given to Yosef was thus at a more advanced level.

Another approach to understanding the seemingly repetitive blessing of “*aleiy ayin*” is: Chazal explain that the *ayin ha’rah* does not affect fish because they are concealed and hidden from the human eye. They go unnoticed. Thus, the first blessing of “*vayidgu*” means that as special as Ephraim and Menasheh may be, they should go unnoticed – and thus not be susceptible to the evil eye. However the blessing of “*aleiy ayin*” given to Yosef (before Yaakov’s passing) was a blessing that offered even greater protection- that even if they were to be noticed, they should not be susceptible to their eye.

The Gemara in Tractate Yomah tells us that the numerical value of “*ha satan* – the satan” is 364. The Gemara explains that the number 364 indicates that satan has the ability to prosecute the Jewish people the entire year with the exception of one day – Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur is the day of ultimate Mercy. Maharal of Prague z’tl explains that on Yom Kippur, a Jew is obliged to afflict himself in five areas – not to eat and drink, not to anoint himself, not to cohabit, not to wash himself, and not to wear leather shoes. These areas of deprivation are areas which deny the person of his most elementary needs. The Torah does not want the Jew to even address his most basic needs. Hashem tells the Jew that on Yom Kippur, he must negate himself to such an extreme level because the only one who is susceptible to prosecution is the one who is noticed. Therefore as a result of self-negation, satan does not prosecute – causing the Jewish people to be the greatest beneficiaries of the Attribute of Mercy.

People aspire to succeed in order to be acknowledged and noticed. However as we have explained, being noticed brings prosecution upon the individual and subjects him to the *ayin ha’rah*. The Gemara in Tractate Berachos tells us that Chanah (who was barren), the mother of Samuel the Prophet, had prayed and beseeched Hashem to be able to conceive a child. However, the child, as special as he may be, should not be noticed among men. Despite the fact that *Shmuel HaNavie* (the prophet), her son, was the equivalent of Moshe and Aaron, she did not wish that he should be noticed in order to protect him from the *ayin ha’rah* (*evil eye*). The focus and emphasis of every Jew should be to succeed and not to be noticed. We should all merit the protection from the evil eye by going unnoticed despite our level of success.