

**Yad Avraham Institute**  
WEEKLY TORAH COMMENTARIES SERIES  
*The Portion of*

***Shemos***

December 27, 2007

**Presented By: Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, Shlita**

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B"H

## Shemos

Presented by

Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky, *Shlita*

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### 1. The Worthiness of The Meritorious

The Torah tells us that Shifrah (Yocheved) and Puah (Miriam) were the Jewish midwives who oversaw the delivery of all the Jewish children born in Egypt. Chazal explain that Yocheved was called Shifrah because her role was to cleanse and beautify the newborn child (*l'shapeir* – to beautify), while Miriam was called Puah because she was the one who calmed and quieted the newborns (Puah is the calming sound made to quiet a crying child). By identifying Yocheved as Shifrah and Miriam as Puah, the Torah is revealing to us the disposition of each of them – thus qualifying them in each of their areas. Why does the Torah not identify Yocheved and Miriam by name? Why is it necessary for the Torah to reveal their specific areas of responsibility?

The Torah states, **“The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives (Yocheved and Miriam)...’When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthstool; if it is a son, you are to kill him and if it is a daughter, she shall live.’ But the midwives feared G’d and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live.”** Yocheved and Miriam defied the king of Egypt. They were not intimidated by his directive to kill the Jewish newborn males.

Most often one’s behavior is determined by one’s own emotional make up and disposition. For example, if a woman were given an ultimatum to either kill her own child, or suffer dire consequences, her maternal connection to her child would not allow her to respond to the threat – regardless of its consequences.

The Torah quantifies Yocheved as “Shifrah” in order reveal to us the basis for her expertise in caring for the Jewish children. It was because of her intense love for them that she was devoted to clean and beauty the children, despite the unpleasant circumstance. Miriam is

quantified as “Puah” to communicate to us her unlimited patience with the Jewish children, in order to indicate her special love for them. One would think that Yocheved and Miriam defied the order of Pharaoh because it was contrary to their essence as dedicated women. Therefore the Torah tells us that this was not the basis for their defiance, of the king of Egypt, but rather it was their “fear of G’d.”

The Torah tells us that because Yocheved and Miriam did not heed the king of Egypt, **“G’d did good”** to them. The Torah states, **“G’d did good to the midwives - and the people increased and became very strong. And it was because the midwives feared G’d that He made houses for them.”** Rashi cites Chazal who explain that the **“houses”** that they merited are the houses of Priesthood (Kehunah), the Tribe of Levy (Leviyah)- for Yocheved, and the house of Kingship/royalty (Malchus) – for Miriam.

It is interesting to note that the Torah first tells us, **“G’d did good to the midwives...”** one would think that the Torah would conclude that He provided them with “houses.” However, the verse digresses to address the fact that simultaneously, **“the people increased and became very strong.”** Why is this not considered a digression?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the reason the Torah interjects the fact that the Jewish people increased in number very much, is to teach us that G’d wanted the result of the sacrifice of Yocheved and Miriam to have great ramifications – thus increasing the value of their initiative. They were thus allowed to merit the “houses” of Priesthood, Leviyah, and Kingship. We find a similar concept offered by Chofetz Chaim.

The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that because of Avraham’s hospitality of the angels, soon after his circumcision, the Jewish people merited many benefits. In the merit of the angels being protected by the shade of Avraham’s tree, the Jewish people merited the Clouds of

Glory that protected them on multiple levels for forty years in the desert. In the merit of Avraham offering his bread, the Jewish people merited the Manna. In the merit of the water that was offered, the Jewish people merited the Wellspring of Miriam that provided them with water in the desert. Every aspect of Avraham's hospitality to the angels was scrutinized and evaluated by G'd to be dealt with measure for measure.

When Avraham hosted the angels, he was ninety-nine years old. He had already devoted many years of his life to acts of kindness and hospitality. Chofetz Chaim asks, "Why is the Torah so exacting with this particular incident of hospitality that Avraham, our Patriarch offered the angels? Why are the ramifications of this particular act so profound and far-reaching?"

Chofetz Chaim explains that the value of the act of kindness is not only determined by the quality of the person doing it but also by the spiritual dimension of the recipient. Although Avraham had provided hospitality to many individuals for the sake of espousing monotheism, his greatest act of hospitality was when he had hosted the angels. Because the value of this mitzvah is determined by its beneficiary, Avraham had merited to have the most special guests. All the hospitality that he had provided throughout his lifetime culminated with this moment of hosting the angels.

The Jewish midwives of Egypt defied Pharaoh only because they feared G'd. Because of their great sacrifice to G'd, He wanted to create a setting that they should be more meritorious. By increasing the numbers of Jews that proliferated only as a result of their decision not to kill the Jewish male children, their sacrifice had the ultimate value. Thus, allowing them to merit the "houses" that they had.

## **2. Yaakov's Uncompromising Dedication to G'd**

The Torah states, "**And these are the names of the Children of Israel who were coming to Egypt...**" The Midrash states, "Yitzchak and Ishmael were brothers. Yaakov and Esav were brothers. However when the Torah identifies those who descended to Egypt it does not mention Ishmael or Esav. Why did they not come to Egypt?"

The Torah tells us that at the Covenant Between the Parts, G'd had said to Avraham, our Patriarch, "**Your children shall be strangers in a land that is not theirs**

**for 400 years...they shall be enslaved and afflicted.."** After G'd had said to Avraham that the Land of Canaan shall be his and his children's, Avraham had asked a question that was considered inappropriate. He had asked, "**How will I know that my children will inherit it?**" In order to atone for Avraham's lack of faith, the Jewish people were destined to be enslaved in Egypt. If this is so, why were Ishmael and Esav, who were the progeny of Avraham, not subject to the bondage in Egypt as the Jewish people were?

The Midrash explains this with an allegory, "Reb Elazer says that this is analogous to one who had borrowed money from the king. Soon after loan was received, the borrower passed away and the debt came due. The borrower had left two sons who were his heirs. One of the sons was a dedicated subject of the king and served him while the other son fled. The king had said to one who was serving him, 'From you I will collect your father's debt.' The son responded, 'Is it not enough that I am your faithful servant? Why should I bear the burden of my father's debt when my brother has fled from before you?' The king responded, 'I swear on your life that I will give you a great reward for what you are doing. When we will capture your brother, he will become your slave.' At the end of time, the Jewish people will inherit the portion of Esav."

Yaakov, by agreeing to go to Egypt with his family, was in essence paying/rehabilitating the spiritual debt/deficiency that was created as a result of Avraham's question. Ishmael and Esav had no interest to service the debt. Because of Yaakov's willingness to address Avraham's spiritual liability, the Jewish people at the end of time will be greatly rewarded. Ishmael and Esav shall be indebted to them as slaves. Why should the bondage and exile establish them as masters over Ishmael and Esav?

The Egyptian exile is referred to by the Torah as "**the iron smelter.**" Just as a smelter heats the iron in order to remove its impurities, so too did the bondage of Egypt affect the Jewish people to be worthy to receive the Torah at Sinai. Had they not been sufficiently qualified to receive the Torah at Sinai, the objective of creation for the sake of Torah would not have come to fruition. Because the Jewish people were the ones who were willing to address the spiritual deficiency that was brought about by Avraham, thus enabling to bring about G'd's glory through the Torah, they will be established as the masters. The Jewish people were willing to endure the Egyptian bondage for hundreds of years only to sanctify the Name of G'd. In contrast, Ishmael and Esav shirked their responsibility. They had no interest whatsoever in G'd or His Glory. They thus deserve to forfeit their positions as

masters and assume the position of slaves to the Jewish people, who are the Chosen. All existence is contingent and subordinated to the Torah. Consequently, the Jewish people, who represent G'd through the Torah, will dominate Ishmael and Esav.

We say in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur that G'd should instill fear in all mankind. We also ask that G'd should give honor to His people. If Chazal teach us that a Jew should flee from honor, why do we supplicate G'd, on the most solemn days of the year, to give honor to His people?

The Jewish people throughout history have been persecuted and victimized because of their unwillingness to compromise on their belief in G'd. The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin tells us that a Jew must give his life to sanctify G'd's Name – even regarding a decree that relates to a mode of dress. For example, if it were decreed that the Jew, who normally wears black bootstraps, must wear red bootstraps as the gentile, the Jew must give his life and not change his mode of dress. Because of the Jews uncompromising posture at all cost, they are seen as unreasonable and foolish.

When G'd will instill fear in all mankind and the nations of the world will understand and appreciate G'd for what He is, they will experience a moment of clarity and thus honor the Jewish people. When G'd will reveal His Presence, mankind will appreciate the sacrifice of the Jewish people throughout the ages. They will bemoan their own opportunity that they had missed. They will understand their own culpability for not acting as true servants to G'd.

Because Yaakov, our Patriarch had understood the value of the Egyptian exile, he was willing to endure whatever the bondage was meant to bring about. However, Ishmael and Esav, having no relevance to spirituality, did not appreciate the need of this sacrifice.

### ***3. The Decline of the Jewish People in Egypt***

The Torah states, “**A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt, who did not know Yosef.**” Rashi cites the Gemara in Tractate Sotah that presents two opinions regarding the meaning of “**a new king...**” One opinion is that there was a new Pharaoh who ascended the throne who did not know Yosef. The second opinion is that Pharaoh was actually the same king who knew Yosef; however, he legislated a new mandate to deal with the Jewish people. Thus, he conducted himself as if he did not

know Yosef. Because of the nature of the original relationship between Yosef, the Viceroy of Egypt and Pharaoh, how could he in good conscience enslave Yosef's family? Thus, the Torah is telling us that he behaved as if he had never known Yosef.

The Midrash states, “The verse states, ‘They (the Jewish People) betrayed G'd and they fathered strange children. Because of this, they will be eaten by *'chodesh.'* They bore children and did not circumcise them. The moment Yosef had passed away, the Jewish people nullified the mitzvah of circumcision. They had said, ‘We shall be like the Egyptians.’ When G'd had seen that they no longer wanted to identify themselves with Him, by nullifying the sign of the covenant/circumcision, He nullified the love of the Egyptians for the Jewish people. As it states, ‘He changed their heart to despise His people...’ Now they will be consumed by *'chodesh.'* As it states, ‘A new king (*melech chadash*) arose over Egypt.’ (Without vowels the word *chodesh* is read *chadash*) This king enacted new decrees to embitter their lives.” Thus, the reason new edicts came upon the Jewish people was because they betrayed G'd by no longer circumcised themselves. As long as Yosef, their benefactor was alive, the Jewish people would not even consider identifying themselves with the Egyptian people.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the bondage was instituted in stages. As the Jewish people regressed spiritually, the bondage assumed various levels of intensity. Before Yosef's passing, his family was seen by the Egyptian people as royalty. However, after his passing, they were no longer regarded as people of privileged status. They were treated as equals by society. After the entire generation that had come to Egypt with Yaakov had passed away, the Jew assumed as sub-class position within Egypt.

Since the Jewish people assumed an ordinary status, after Yosef had passed away, they believed that it was important for them to be valued by the Egyptians for the sake of their survival. They thus ceased to circumcise themselves in order to not to be different from the Egyptian.

The Jewish people ceased to circumcise themselves because they wanted to be embraced by the Egyptian community and be treated as equals. They believed that their success and survival was contingent on their relationship with the Egyptian people, rather than understanding that all of their blessing and security emanated from G'd. Consequently, G'd caused the

Egyptians to perceive the Jewish people in the most negative light and despise them, rather than embrace them.

The Gemara in Tractate Berachos states, “A person should live in the same community as his rebbe (teacher). As we see that, as long as Shimie Ben Gera was alive, his student King Solomon did not marry the daughter of Pharaoh. Because this was unacceptable to his teacher, King Solomon could not justify his rationale to marry her.”

As long as Yosef was alive, the Jewish people would not even consider not circumcising themselves because it was something that would not have been tolerated by Yosef. However, after he had passed away, there was nothing that could bind them to their obligations as the descendants of Yaakov. They thus ceased to circumcise themselves. This was unlike Yosef, who as the Gemara in Tractate Sotah tells us, that he did not succumb to the sexual advances of his master's wife because he saw the image of Yaakov, his father before his eyes. Yaakov's teachings and values were so imbedded in the conscience of Yosef that he could not behave in an inappropriate manner.

The Jewish people over time deteriorated to a point where they had become pagans. This was because they had lived their lives as if they had not known Yosef, their provider. Therefore, the punishment manifested itself in a context of measure for measure. Just as the cause of their spiritual decline was because they behaved as if they did not know Yosef, the king that had arisen over Egypt behaved towards them as if he did not know Yosef. Consequently, he instituted edicts of slavery against them.

#### ***4. The Uniqueness of the Jewish People***

The Torah states, **“Pharaoh had said, ‘Behold! The people of the Children are more numerous and stronger than we...’ So they appointed taskmasters over them in order to afflict them with their burdens; they will build storage cities for Pharaoh, Pison and Raamses.”**

Pharaoh imposed hard labor upon the Jewish people to subject them to strenuous work, so that they will ultimately be destroyed. The Midrash states, “In essence the Jewish people built only one city. The name of the city was called Pison, however it was referred to as Raamses because it crumbled as the Jewish people completed it. Another opinion is that the city was named Raamses; however, it was called Pison, because it was swallowed

upon into the depths of the earth after the Jewish people would complete it. As much as the Egyptian taskmasters forced the Jewish people to build and fortify the city, it ultimately was destroyed.” What was the value of afflicting the Jewish people with overwhelming hard labor? What was the value of building the city if it was repeatedly destroyed?

Pharaoh was initially concerned because the Jewish people had become numerous in the land and they posed a threat. He was concerned that if there was a war, they would conspire with the enemy and drive the Egyptian people from their own land. In order to halt their ability to procreate, Pharaoh imposed upon them hard labor to weaken them physically. He believed that by wearing down their physicality, the Jewish people would no longer pose a threat. However, the opposite occurred. As the verse states, **‘As much as the Egyptians would afflict them, they would increase in number and proliferate...’** Pharaoh did not succeed in limiting their number.

Maharal of Prague in his work *Gevuras Hashem* explains that Pharaoh, based on the principle that one is defined and quantified by his physical accomplishments, he wanted to establish the innate value of the Jewish people. He wanted to demonstrate that their essence was limited to the physical. In order to refute and dispel this belief, G'd caused the city either to crumble or be swallowed up by the earth. This was to demonstrate to Pharaoh that although all other nations are quantified by their accomplishment, because their essence is physical, this is not the case regarding the Jewish people because their essence is spiritual. The destruction of the cities was to prove this fact.

Physicality is something that is finite. However, spirituality is unlimited and thus unquantifiable. When Pharaoh succeeded in weakening the physicality of the Jew through intense hard labor, the spiritual essence of the Jew assumed a predominant position. Rather than being limited by their own physicality, which had been diminished, they multiplied and proliferated in an unlimited manner.

The Torah continues, **“...and the Egyptians became disgusted because of the Children of Israel.”** When the Egyptian people, realized that they could not deny the truth of the essence of the Jewish people, they became disgusted. They could no longer remain in a state of denial.

The Jewish people have survived throughout the ages, despite all of the upheavals and expulsions. They

remain spiritually and physically intact as a Jewish people who defy the odds of survival. The reason for this is that since the essence and make up of the Jew is rooted in his spirituality, it is something that transcends time and circumstance. Although they had spent 210 years in Egypt and had become pagans, their spirituality was revived and reactivated through the miracles that they had witnessed.

### 5. *Man's Vulnerability to Evil* (From Vayechi)

The Torah tells us that before Yaakov passed away he blessed his children, in a manner that secured the potential of each tribe. Regarding Zevulun, Yaakov blessed him saying, **“Zevulun shall settle by the seashores. He shall be at the ship's harbor...”** Yaakov then blessed Yissachar saying, **“Yissachar is a strong-boned donkey; who rests between the boundaries.”** Meaning, that he is the one who continually bears the burden, the yoke of Torah. Through his blessings, Yaakov established a partnership between Zevulun and Yissachar. Zevulun was to be a sea merchant who would be fully responsible to provide all the material needs of his brother Yissachar. This would enable him to dedicate himself uninterruptedly to Torah study.

The Torah states at the end of the Book of Devarim, **“Moshe had blessed the tribe of Zevulun by saying, “Zevulun rejoice in your going out and Yissachar in your tent (of Torah).”** The basis for Zevulun's rejoicing was that his initiative to support Yissachar was only a means to achieve the ultimate objective of enabling Yissachar to study Torah.

Sforno writes, “It is not possible for one to study Torah if he is lacking in what he needs. As it states in the Mishna, ‘*Im ein kemach, ein Torah* – if there is no flour there is no Torah.’ ...When one obligates himself to assist his fellow to find what he is lacking so that he may study Torah, he will be a partner in his success- just as the partnership between Zevulun and Yissachar. Since the Will of G'd is accomplished by both individuals, the merit accrues to both of them; the one who studies Torah and the one provides the means to study. Since the Kohanim (Priests) and Levites were responsible for the dissemination of Torah to the Jewish people, the Torah obligates every Jew to provide gifts and tithes to the Kohen and Levy. By providing their material needs, every Jew has a share in the Torah study of the Kohen and Levy...Thus, every Jew merits a share in the world to come. As it state in the Mishna, ‘Every Jew has a share in the world to come.’”

It is interesting to note that the Gemara tells us that one is only permitted to give the tithes to the Kohen only if he is a Torah scholar. If he is classified as an *“aam haaretz* – person ignorant of Torah” then one is not permitted to give him the tithes. The basis for giving the tithes and gifts is to the Kohen is to facilitate his Torah study. Therefore, if he is not engaged in that pursuit then there is not reason to provide for his other needs.

The Gemara at the end of Tractate Kesubos tells us that if one does not participate in some manner in the study of Torah, he will not be resurrected at the end of time. As the prophet Yeshayahu said, “Your dead shall live, my dead body shall arise; awake and sing, you who repose in the dust. For Your dew is a dew of light, and the earth shall cast down the shades of the dead.” This means that for he who makes use of the light of the Torah, will be revived by the light of Torah, but the one who does not use the light of the Torah, he will not be revived.” The Gemara continues to explain that it is not only the one who engages in Torah study that will be resurrected but also the one who assists the Torah scholar in his studies will merit the same.

The Gemara in Tractate Succah states, “I (G'd) created the evil inclination, and the Torah as its antidote.” Meaning, the only way that one can dispel the evil inclination is through Torah study. If one enables a Torah sage to study, although he is considered to have an equal share in his Torah and thus a share in the world to come, he is not protected from the evil inclination. The Torah is only an antidote for the one who engages in its study.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avos (Ethics of our Fathers) states, “It is appropriate for one to have Torah and *derech erez*. Toiling in both of them will cause sin to be forgotten.” Meaning, one should be fully engaged in Torah study as well as having a means of support. Maharal explains that G'd only gave the evil inclination permission to entice/prosecute an individual when he believes that he has achieved perfection and he is sufficiently complete. However if one is striving to achieve completion and is engaged in this objective, the evil inclination does not have permission to engage with him.

The Gemara in Tractate Sanhedrin states, “Man is inclined for evil from the moment he is cast from his mother's womb.” Maharal asks, “Why does G'd not allow the child to be affected by the evil inclination in-utero before he leave his mother's womb?” While the child is still developing as a fetus, he is not considered to be complete. He is in the processes of development.

However, when he enters into this existence, his basic development, as a human being, has been completed and thus he is subject to the evil inclination. When one is fully engaged in addressing his spirituality through Torah study, it is obvious, through his initiative, that he is in the process to achieve completion. Therefore, he is not subject to the influences of the evil inclination. However, if one takes pride and feels sufficiently accomplished, then he is vulnerable to the evil inclination.

Even when one is a great supporter of Torah, if he does not sufficiently engage Torah himself, he will be influenced by his evil inclination.