

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS SHEMOS

Growing Pains

It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and saw their burdens... (2:11)

This week's *parsha* introduces Pharaoh's scheme and implementation of the Jewish enslavement. The Torah also discusses Moshe's birth and development, and how he came to be the greatest prophet and leader of the Jewish people.

It is well known that Moshe grew up in Pharaoh's house. Rashi (ad loc) explains that not only did Moshe grow into adulthood, he grew in stature as well. As Rashi explains, "Pharaoh appointed him over his household (*'beis Pharaoh'*)."

Rashi, by the *Aseres Hadibros* (20:2), explains that the Jewish slaves were owned directly by Pharaoh and were part of *'beis Pharaoh.'* Thus, Pharaoh took the innovative step of appointing Moshe over his fellow Jews.

This was no accident. Many tyrants and despots appoint members of the victim class over the other victims. In fact, in Egypt the *"shotrim"* were Jewish officers appointed over the other slaves in Egypt to violently enforce quotas (which the *shotrim* refused to do). Similarly, cruel kapos were the method used by the Nazis to control prisoners in the concentration camps.

Theoretically, this is brilliant. It naturally pits members of the oppressed class against one another and breeds mistrust and deception; thereby destroying the unity of the group – exactly what it is supposed to achieve. Pharaoh also added an insidious twist: By appointing Moshe

over them, Pharaoh was showcasing what a Jew can aspire to if he abandons his culture and becomes fully Egyptian.

But Pharaoh underestimated Moshe. He expected Moshe to sympathize with them and, at most, perhaps even advocate for better treatment. Yet Rashi makes a remarkable comment on the words *"and he saw their burdens"* (2:11); "He focused his eyes and heart to be distressed over them." Moshe didn't merely sympathize and feel pity for them, Moshe empathized with them. Sympathy is merely seeing someone's pain and feeling bad for him; however, empathy is a vicarious experience of what another is going through.

Rashi is telling us that Moshe focused his eyes and heart to see what the slaves saw and feel what the slaves felt; he was seeing their situation from their perspective. In fact, Moshe later uses this understanding in his conversations with Hashem. This is probably one of the reasons Moshe was asked by Hashem to fill the role he did.

This is also why Moshe is sentenced to death for killing the Egyptian. On the face of it, this seems a little strange. A prince growing up in the house of a king would rarely be subject to such justice. But once Moshe kills the Egyptian because of what he did to a "lowly" Jew he undermines Pharaoh's vision for his position in the palace – therefore he must flee for his life.



Did You Know...

In this week's *parsha*, Moshe was born hidden from sight, and subsequently found by Pharaoh's daughter Basya. The Torah says that Basya named him Moshe, one of his famously numerous names. Let us examine some of his other names and how they came to be. Based on the Midrash (*Vayikrah Rabbah* 1:3):

1. Yered (ירד), implying "descent": According to one opinion, Moshe was called this name because he brought the Torah down to the Jewish people, and the *Shechina* back down to this physical world.
2. Avigdor (אבי גדור): He was the chief one of those who made fences (safeguards) around the Torah.
3. Chever (חבר): One view is that Moshe joined (חיבר) the Jewish people with Hashem (*Eitz Yosef*, citing Gra), or because he prevented (העביר) disaster from coming to this world (*Matnos Kehuna*).
4. Avi Socho (אבי סוכו): Moshe would grow up to be the →

A Calling for Service

The anger of Hashem burned against Moshe and he said, “Is not your brother Aharon the Levi? I know that he will speak, behold he is coming out to meet and when he sees you he will rejoice in his heart” (4:14).

After a full week of trying to persuade Moshe to accept the position of redeemer of Bnei Yisroel, Hashem displays anger toward Moshe. This follows the last of Moshe’s objections as to why he should not be the one charged with this responsibility. Rashi (ad loc) explains that Hashem’s anger at Moshe’s final argument resulted in him losing the position of Kohen, and being “demoted” to position of Levi.

Additionally, Rashi (ad loc) explains that Moshe was concerned that Aharon would be jealous of his new leadership position. Hashem therefore reassured him that Aharon would actually be happy for him. Rashi also points out that it was for this reason that Aharon merited to become Kohen.

This seems a little hard to understand. Certainly Moshe wouldn’t accuse Aharon of being a lesser man than he, so this means that had the roles been reversed and he had been in Aharon’s sandals, Moshe himself would have been jealous. Why would Moshe be jealous, and if in fact it was natural to be jealous of this appointment, why wasn’t Aharon himself jealous?

Interestingly enough, we do find an instance in the Torah where Moshe feels a twinge of jealousy. The *Yalkut Shimoni (Devarim 31:941)* points out that Moshe experienced jealousy when he saw Yehoshua, his very own student, supplant him as leader of Bnei Yisroel and receive a communication from Hashem that he himself wasn’t privy to. Moshe said, “It is better to experience one thousand deaths than to experience

one instance of jealousy.”

Clearly Moshe felt jealous because he saw his student taking his place, and the pain of seeing the loss of one’s own position can be overwhelming. So why didn’t Aharon feel jealous? After all, his younger brother was being given a position of leadership that rightfully belonged to him.

Aharon recognized that while it’s true that redeeming Bnei Yisroel and becoming their leader was a position of greatness, it’s not an appointment. In other words, when Hashem asks you to take this role, it’s one primarily of service to Bnei Yisroel and Hashem’s plan for the world. This job isn’t about the stature that comes with the responsibility, it’s about being a servant to that responsibility.

Moshe was bothered by the stature associated with the job. He spends a week explaining why he isn’t the right person for this job. When at the end of the week he still feels that Aharon would be jealous of his new position, Hashem gets angry and explains to him that Aharon understands that this is about responsibility to serve – not the associated stature. It is for this reason that Moshe loses the right to be a Kohen and this role is given to Aharon. Kohanim are “*Meshorsei Hamelech*” – ministers of the king. There is no sense of stature in this leadership role; only responsibility to serve Hashem. Aharon understood that when called to the responsibility of serving Hashem you have to accept and that stature plays no role in the decision.

Did You Know Continued

father of all the *Neviim* who see (סוכין) through *Ruach Hakosdesh*.

5. Yekutiel (יקותיאל): One opinion says that he caused Bnei Yisroel to look with hope (קוין) towards Hashem.
6. Avi Zanoach (אבי זנוח): Because Moshe caused Bnei Yisroel to abandon (למזניהם) idol worship.
7. Tuviah (טוביה): “She saw that he was good (טוב)” (*Shemos* 2:2). There’s an argument (*Shemos Rabbah* 1:20) as to whether his name is Tov or Tuviah. Moreover, whether it means he was fit for *nevuah*, that he was born circumcised, or that when he was born the whole house filled with light.
8. Shemayah ben Nesanel: Hashem heard (שמע) his prayers about the golden calf, and he was the son (בן) to whom the Torah was given (נתנה) from Hashem (א-ל).
9. Levi (לוי): Named after the *shevet* to which Moshe belonged.
10. Moshe: In Egyptian, Moshe means son. Basya took him as a son (*Ibn Ezra*). Alternatively, it comes from the Egyptian word “*mo*” (water) and “*uses*” (drown from) (*Josephus, Antiquities* 2:9:6). Some sources state that his Egyptian name was Monius (*Ibn Ezra*). Interestingly, Hashem told Moshe, “I will call you only by the name you were called by Basya” (*Vayikrah Rabbah* 1:3).



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