

THE PATH YOU CHOOSE

by Shlomo Katz

Hamaayan / The Torah Spring Edited by Shlomo Katz

Shemos

**Volume XVI, No. 13
21 Tevet 5762
January 5, 2002**

Today's Learning:

Sanhedrin 1:1-2

Orach Chaim 562:7-9

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 44

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevi'it 12

This week's parashah describes the beginning of the process that led to the Exodus from Egypt, including Moshe and Aharon's initial appearances before Pharaoh. Our Sages teach that when these brothers first appeared before Pharaoh, they miraculously walked through a heavily guarded doorway into the midst of a large state dinner. Despite this obvious miracle, Pharaoh hardened his heart and ignored them.

The second time that Moshe and Aharon visited Pharaoh, they performed another miracle, i.e., they turned Aharon's staff into a snake. Pharaoh's magicians mimicked Aharon's act, but he performed another miracle and won the day when his staff swallowed theirs. Nevertheless, Pharaoh still hardened his heart and ignored Moshe and Aharon.

The next time that the two brothers appeared before the king, they turned water into blood. Again the magicians did the same, and this time, Moshe and Aharon did not even score a victory over

them.

R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (1885-1974; mashgiach in the Mir Yeshiva in Shanghai and the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak) notes that each of these tests was easier for Pharaoh to fail than the preceding one. Each of Moshe and Aharon's miracles was smaller than the one before it. This is Hashem's way - he tests a person, and should the person ignore the challenge, Hashem leads him down the path which he has chosen. Spiritual failure becomes easier with each step. (Quoted in the Artscroll Mussar Haggadah p. 82)

"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was Shifrah and the name of the second was Puah. And he said, '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 God . . . " (1:15-17)

The first time the verse mentions that Pharaoh "said," it does not say what he said. R' Elazar Mayer Preil z"l (see back page) explains in the name of R' Shemaryah Yitzchak Bloch z"l (1863-?; rabbi in Birmingham, England) as follows:

Pharaoh assumed that the Jews felt so lowly and insignificant that they would be touched by the fact that he "lowered" himself to address them. Pharaoh assumed that this alone would persuade the midwives to follow his instructions. Thus, before he said, "When you deliver the Hebrew women . . .," he "said to the Hebrew midwives," i.e., he made conversation with them.

Why did his plan fail? Because, "the midwives feared G-d." (Sefer Hamaor Vol. II)

"Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, 'Every son that will be born -- into the River shall you throw him! And every daughter shall you keep alive!'" (1:22)

"She [Yocheved] could not hide him [Moshe] any longer, so she took for him a wicker basket 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. His sister [Miriam] stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him." (2:3-4)

Later, after the splitting of the Yam Suf, the Torah relates that (15:20): "Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aharon, took her drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances." Why did the women have musical instruments with them? Rashi writes that the righteous women in that generation were confident that God would perform miracles for them and they accordingly had brought musical instruments with them from Egypt. R' Levi Yitzchak Horowitz shlita (the "Bostoner Rebbe") notes that the men were not similarly prepared.

R' Horowitz continues: Miriam's faith in G-d's miracles is evident in our verses as well. Miriam was

confident that Moshe would be saved; therefore, she "stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him." "At a distance" may also refer to her foresight, to her prophetic look into the future to see that this baby would grow-up to be the redeemer of the Jewish people. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ezrat Avoteinu p. 136)

"During those many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to Elokim." (2:23)

R' Shmuel Shmelke Horowitz z"l (1726-1778; rabbi of Nikolsburg, Moravia) comments: This verse praises the Jewish people. Although they groaned because of the difficult work, their outcry "went up to G-d," i.e., what made them cry was not the backbreaking labor but the desecration of G-d's Name that was being caused by their condition.

(Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Ezrat Avoteinu p. 132)

R' Eliezer Nachman Poah z"l (Italian kabbalist; rabbi of Modena; died 1701) explains this verse differently. He writes: When one is in such pain that he cannot formulate his prayers properly, he should simply cry out to G-d. Those prayers will go up to Elokim, a reference to G-d's Attribute of Justice. The Heavenly Tribunal will then evaluate these sincerely uttered prayers and the proper Divine Attributes (i.e., manifestation of G-d's powers) will come to the fore in response.

He adds: Bnei Yisrael in Egypt did not know what Divine Attributes Hashem would use to redeem them, so they did not know how to formulate their prayers. This is why Moshe asked (3:13), "When they say to me, 'What is His Name?' - what shall I say to them?" Since each Name of Hashem refers to a different manifestation of Him, Moshe meant, "What Attribute shall I tell them will redeem them?" (Haggadah Shel Pesach Midrash Be'chiddush)

"Hashem said, 'I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters for I have known of its pain'." (3:7)

R' Yaakov Yitzchak z"l (the "Chozeh" of Lublin; 1745-1815) interpreted: Hashem said: "Even though I know the pain that the Jewish people cause Me because they do not observe the mitzvot properly, nevertheless, I hear their outcry because of their taskmasters, because they are righteous compared to those who oppress them." (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Ezrat Avoteinu p. 132)

"So Tziporah took a tzor / sharp stone and cut off the foreskin of her son . . ." (4:25)

The Talmud (Avodah Zarah 27a) records a dispute whether a woman may personally circumcise her son. The gemara notes that our verse presents a problem for the Sage who prohibits a woman from

circumcising, and the gemara answers that Tziporah actually appointed an agent to circumcise her son.

We may find this alluded to in the verse: "So Tziporah took a tzor / sharp stone." If we take that letters "tzadi reish" (for "tzor" / "sharp stone") from "tziporah," we are left with the letters "peh heh" (for "peh" / "mouth"). This teaches, according to that sage, that she actually performed the mitzvah by instructing someone else (with her mouth) to circumcise her son. (Mi'pi Ha'shmuah)

R' Elazar Mayer Preil z"l

R' Elazar Mayer Preil was born in Lithuania in 1878, and was orphaned at a young age. At age 13, the future R' Preil ran away from his foster parents' home when they insisted that he stop learning and devote his full time to farming. He fled to Telz, where he was taken in by R' Yosef Leib Bloch and his wife, the daughter and son-in-law of the rosh hayeshiva, R' Eliezer Gordon.

When R' Preil was 17, R' Bloch left Telz for the town of Shadova, and R' Preil, newly married, went with him. In addition to teaching at the yeshiva there, R' Preil worked as a pharmacist and as a photographer.

Following the death of his first wife and their only child, R' Preil moved to England. There he served first as a fundraiser for the Telz Yeshiva, and, beginning in 1907, as rabbi in Manchester. In 1911, he moved to the United States, where his brother-in-law, R' Avraham Nachman Schwartz (1871-1937) was a prominent rabbi in Baltimore.

In the U.S., R' Preil, taught Yeshivat Etz Chaim, the precursor to Yeshiva Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan and Yeshiva University, from 1912-1924. He also served as rabbi in Trenton, New Jersey, and then in Elizabeth, New Jersey. He also was an officer of the Central Relief Fund (to help Jews devastated by World War I) and was a founder and secretary of the charity Ezras Torah.

In 1920, R' Preil authored A Handbook for the Jewish Woman, devoted to the mitzvot that are incumbent upon women. In this book, he became one of the first rabbis to call for organized Jewish education for girls, arguing that the home could no longer be trusted to provide the education that girls needed. In that same year he turned his words into action, founding a day school in Elizabeth which taught Jewish studies in the morning and secular studies in the afternoon. This school lasted only three years. R' Preil also tried to establish a mikvah in Elizabeth, but the community insisted that the one in Newark was close enough.

R' Preil also authored two volumes entitled Hamaor. The first volume collects his responsa on halachic / legal and hashkafic / Jewish-philosophic topics. The second volume includes Torah commentary and sermons.

R' Preil died on Erev Sukkot 5694 / October 3, 1933. His second wife, Freida Mann (1890-1972), bore

him four children. In his will, R' Preil asked that his rabbinic position in Elizabeth be reserved for whomever his oldest daughter would marry, if he proved worthy. That man was R' Mordechai Pinchas Teitz z"l, who was to serve as rabbi of Elizabeth for six decades. (Source: Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah Ch. 6).

Copyright © 2001 by [Shlomo Katz](#) and Project Genesis, Inc.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
