

THE BABY AND THE BATH WATER

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Shemos

The Baby and the Bath Water

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Today's Learning:
Pesachim 7:5-6
O.C. 498:16-18
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 4
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Demai 5

In this first part of this week's parashah we read how Pharaoh conspired to enslave the Jewish People and prevent them from growing as a nation. At one point, he even commanded that every newborn baby be thrown into the Nile.

Rashi z"l writes that this last decree was not against Bnei Yisrael alone, for the Torah says (1:22), "Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, 'Every son that will be born -- into the River shall you throw him!'" Rashi explains that Pharaoh's astrologers told him that the savior of Bnei Yisrael would be born on a certain day, and he might be Jewish or he might be Egyptian. (They were confused because the savior, Moshe, actually would be a Jew who would grow up in the palace of an Egyptian.)

R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld z"l (1848-1932; see page 4) observes that this story illustrates how Hashem pulls all the strings behind the scenes and uses every person to bring about the result that

His Will has ordained. The Gemara (Chagigah 15a) teaches that everything in the world has an opposite. In the physical world, for example, there are mountains and valleys, etc. In the spiritual world, there are tzaddikim and resha'im, Gan Eden and Gehinnom, etc. In the same vein, we are taught that the opposing forces of good and evil must be balanced in the world in order to preserve man's ability to exercise his free will. According to Hashem's own design, if a soul enters the world that has the ability to become a great tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu, another soul must come into the world that has the potential to counter-balance that holiness by spreading unspeakable evil and impurity.

Whatever became of the impure soul that was destined to counter-balance the soul of Moshe Rabbeinu? We never hear of such a person! The answer, says R' Sonnenfeld, is that "Pharaoh commanded his entire people, saying, 'Every son that will be born -- into the River shall you throw him!'" Unwittingly, Pharaoh killed the one person who could have prevented Moshe Rabbeinu's future mission from succeeding. (Chochmat Chaim)

"Moshe replied to Hashem, 'Please, my Master, I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech'." (4:10)

Many explanations have been offered for why Hashem chose a person with a speech impediment to be His spokesman. As for the origin of Moshe's handicap, a widely-known midrash describes how Moshe burnt his tongue as a child. However, writes R' Shmuel ben Meir z"l ("Rashbam"; grandson and student of Rashi; died 1174), the pshat / basic understanding of the verses is that Moshe did not have any speech impediment. Rather, when he said, "I am not a man of words . . . I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech," he meant only that he was not fluent in the Egyptian language because he fled from Egypt as a young man.

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; see page 4) offers another interpretation of our verse which, like Rashbam's explanation, presumes that Moshe had no physical impediment. He writes:

Rambam z"l describes two stages in becoming a prophet. Any person who perfects himself can become a prophet and be privy to certain secrets of the Upper Worlds. Then, if Hashem chooses, such a person can be appointed to become Hashem's messenger. [Our Sages tell us that there have been more than one million prophets in Jewish history, but only 55 conveyed messages of lasting significance.]

Rambam writes further that when a person attains the first level of prophecy, he feels a new spirit of holiness overtake him. Rambam calls this level "Ruach Ha'kodesh."

Says R' Kook: A person's knowledge that he has attained Ruach Ha'kodesh derives from the fact that

he has worked on himself until the point that he feels himself a changed person. In contrast, because the next level of prophecy is the result of Hashem's "choice" and not the result of self-improvement, a person cannot feel that he is ready for it. It comes by surprise.

Moshe Rabbeinu surely knew that he had attained the first level of prophecy-Ruach Ha'kodesh. However, he did not feel that he had grown beyond that level. Being a new prophet, he did not know that the next step is the result of being chosen, not the result of one's own preparedness. He therefore argued: I do not feel ready to be Hashem's messenger. I do not feel like a man of words. I have not prepared for this, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant. Rather, I feel like I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech.

(Nevuat Mada U'nevuat Dibbur reprinted in Otzrot Ha'Reiyah II p.131)

"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah"

("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794). The primary theme of this work is improving one's concentration in prayer.

In the introductory section entitled Sha'ar Ha'gadol / Sha'ar Avodat Ha'lev, the author laid down some general concepts that can lead a person to greater devotion, in particular the importance of being gladdened by that which "pleases" G-d and being saddened by that which "disappoints" Him. Related to this is the importance of the mitzvot of "You shall love your fellow as yourself," and "With righteousness you shall judge your fellow."

In Sha'ar Ha'sheni / Sha'ar Ha'ashmoret, the author begins to discuss one's daily activities (including prayer) and specific ways that one can make them more meaningful. In chapter 2, he discusses the blessings recited upon awakening, and he writes:

The wisest of all men [Shlomo Ha'melech] wrote (Kohelet 5:1), "Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart be hasty to utter a word before G-d . . ." Take this to heart and know before Whom and to Whom you are speaking. Adopt this as a rule-no matter what blessing you are reciting, when you say "Baruch Attah," see yourself as standing before the Creator, may He be blessed. This is, after all, what the words mean; "Attah" means "You." We are speaking to G-d in the second person as if He is before us.

This is a great obligation that is incumbent on every person at every prayer and praise-let no part of the service of Hashem escape from your lips out of habit. Rather, recognize that you are standing before Him, for the entire world is filled with His glory. If one does not see himself as standing before Hashem when he says "Baruch Attah," it is apparent to any thinking person that it is as if no blessing was recited at all. One's punishment for this is great, for he has neglected a duty imposed by the

Anshei Knesset Ha'gedolah (the assembly of Sages that composed the blessings at the beginning of the Second Temple era) and he has deprived the Creator of "pleasure" that He could have had. This is aside from the transgression of uttering G-d's Name in vain. If a person is thinking about something else when he recites a berachah, even if he is thinking about divrei Torah, it is a grave sin.

One should also be careful when he says the words "Elokenu Melech Ha'olam" not to run the words together ["Ekenumecholan"]. Rather, one should think about the translation of these words in his native language and should feel great joy over His Eloket / Power and the greatness of His Malchut / Kingdom.

R' Pinchas Epstein z"l

R' Epstein, Av Bet Din / Chief Judge of the rabbinical court of the Eidah Ha'chareidit of Yerushalayim, was born in Griva, Lithuania in 1887. He studied at several Lithuanian yeshivot, but his primary teacher was R' Zalman Sender Kahana Shapiro in Bialystok.

In 1904, when he was 17, R' Epstein settled in Eretz Yisrael with his father and began studying at Yeshiva Torat Chaim in the Old City of Yerushalayim.

R' Epstein was one of the founders and early leaders of the Eidah Ha'chareidit, a group which split from the established Yerushalayim community in 1919 in response to the growing influence of the Zionists on the existing religious council. At the time, Yerushalayim had been without an Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi for ten years, and, soon after its founding, the Eidah Ha'chareidit appointed R' Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld as its Chief Rabbi. At about the same time, the more established community named R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook to the position of Chief Rabbi. As the emissary of the Eidah Ha'chareidit, R' Epstein attempted to convince R' Kook not to accept the position offered to him, ostensibly in order to preserve the unity of the Yerushalayim community. (The leaders of the Eidah Ha'chareidit did not oppose R' Kook personally; indeed, R' Sonnenfeld had worked with R' Kook on communal issues when the latter was Rabbi of Jaffa. However, the Eidah Ha'chareidit did object to R' Kook's association with Dr. Chaim Weizmann and to the appearance that the Chief Rabbinate was a tool of the secular Zionists.)

R' Epstein lived in the Old City and served as a neighborhood posek / halachic authority until the Arab occupation began in 1948. In a 1963 haskamah / letter of recommendation to the work Toldot Chaim by R' Chaim Braun of Brooklyn, New York, R' Epstein comments on one of the subjects addressed in that work: "I saw this discussed in the journal Ha'posek that was published in Tel Aviv many decades ago, but I do not remember the conclusion. That journal was left behind in the Old City which was destroyed due to our many sins, together with my house and my library."

In 1949, R' Epstein was appointed to head the Eidah Ha'chareidit. He passed away on 17 Tevet 5730 (1970) and was buried in the Perushim section on Har Ha'zeitim. (Sources: Kedoshim Asher Ba'aretz p.

150; Guardian of Jerusalem ch. 25; Sefer Toldot Chaim p. 4)

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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 **Torah.org** 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/>.

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