

THE WISE

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Parshas Shemos

The Wise

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Today's Learning:
Tamid 4:3-5:1
O.C. 265:2-4
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Kamma 20
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Gittin 38

King Shlomo writes in Mishlei (24:5), "The wise man ('gever') remains steadfast, and the man of knowledge grows stronger." Rabbeinu Yonah z"l (Spain; 1180-1263) writes: It is well known that the three major characteristics for which people are praised in this world are: wisdom, strength (gevurah), and wealth. Wisdom is the most secure of these, for it resides within a person's soul. Moreover, one's wisdom generally increases with age. Strength is next, for it resides within a person's body. However, as a person grows older, his strength generally lessens. Wealth is the least secure, for it is external.

Nevertheless, writes Rabbeinu Yonah, strength and wealth actually are derivatives of wisdom. Thus King Shlomo writes in the verses that precede ours (24:3-4), "Through wisdom a house is built . . . and through knowledge, its chambers become filled with all dear and pleasant treasures." And, he writes in the verse that follows ours (24:6), "Through wise strategies, you can wage war . . ."

The verse with which we opened can be applied to Moshe Rabbeinu, writes Rabbeinu Yonah. Moshe was the wisest of all men, and he demonstrated steadfastness and strength against Pharaoh. Through Moshe, Hashem's strength was demonstrated to the world. However, Moshe used his wisdom and strength to help the oppressed even before Hashem appointed him to be His agent, as related in our parashah (see, for example, 2:12 and 2:17). These events are what led to Moshe's

appointment as the savior of Bnei Yisrael, in keeping with our verse, "The man of knowledge grows stronger [i.e., more powerful]." (Drashot U'perushei Rabbeinu Yonah al Ha'Torah)

"And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt; with Yaakov . . ." (Shmot 1:1)

Why does the pasuk begin with "Yisrael" and continue with "Yaakov"? R' Yoel Herzog z"l (Paris, France; early 20th century; father of Israeli Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Halevi Herzog z"l) explains based on the similar wording in the verse in Parashat Vayigash which describes Yaakov's descent to Egypt. There we read (Bereishit 46:8), "Now these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt -- Yaakov and his children." We also read there (verse 2): "G-d spoke to Yisrael in a night vision and He said, 'Yaakov, Yaakov'." Why the change from Yisrael to Yaakov?

The answer is that "Yisrael," the name given to our Patriarch after he defeated Esav's guardian angel, represents the fulfillment of Yitzchak's blessing that his son would rule over the other nations. When Yisrael/Yaakov was descending to Egypt, where his son was the viceroy to Pharaoh, our Patriarch and his children thought that he was going as "Yisrael." But Hashem appeared to him in a dream and informed him that this was not the case. Rather, Hashem told him, his journey was the beginning of the exile that had been foretold to Avraham. Therefore, He called the Patriarch "Yaakov."

Perhaps Yaakov did not immediately tell his children about his dream. Therefore, they continued to believe that they were going to Egypt as the "Children of Yisrael." However, they went not with Yisrael, but with Yaakov. (Imrei Yoel)

"He [Moshe] turned this way and that and saw that there was no man, so he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand." (2:12)

"The shepherds came and drove them [the daughters of Yitro] away; Moshe got up and saved them, and watered their sheep." (2:17)

We read in Bemidbar (12:3), "The man Moshe was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth." How are Moshe's actions in the above verses from our parashah and other events in the Torah (e.g., smashing the luchot) consistent with his trait of humility?

R' Yechezkel Levenstein z"l (mashgiach ruchani of the Mir and Ponovezh yeshivot; died 1974) explains that we are wrong to equate humility with timidity and weakness. A humble person is humble because his awe of G-d leads him to recognize his inadequacy vis-a-vis the Creator. As a corollary, a humble person fears only G-d, and not man. (Quoted in Le'anavim Yitain Chen p.125)

R' Yosef Yozel Horowitz z"l (the Alter of Novardok; died 1920) describes humility as follows: A

humble person does not think that he has no positive traits. However, he is so disturbed by whatever negative traits he has that he has no time to think about his positive traits. To what may this be compared? To a small cut on one's finger (for example, a paper cut), which causes pain disproportionate to its size. (Madregat Ha'adam: Ma'amar Tikkun Ha'midot ch.4)

"Let the work be heavier upon the men and let them engage in it; and let them not pay attention to false words." (5:9)

In this verse, Pharaoh reasoned that if Bnei Yisrael were forced to work harder, they would not have time to dream about freedom. R' Moshe Chaim Luzzato z"l (Ramchal; 1707-1747) observes that the yetzer hara uses the same strategy to distract a person from focusing on his task in this world. Specifically, man's task is to reflect upon every step he wishes to take and every action he wishes to perform and to ask himself: Will this step or action bring me closer to G-d or will it cause me to become distant from G-d? The yetzer hara knows that if man would merely think about his actions, he would certainly begin to regret his deeds, Ramchal writes. To prevent this, the yetzer hara makes sure that we are constantly busy with all types of activities and tasks that appear to be very important. (Mesilat Yesharim ch.2)

To what kinds of distractions is Ramchal referring? R' Yaakov Moshe Hillel shlita (a contemporary rosh yeshiva and leading kabbalist in Israel) observes: We find in old sefarim that when a tzaddik died in one city, he was eulogized months later in another town because it took that long for news to travel. [Ed. note: See an example of this on page 4 of this week's issue.] In 19th century America, R' Hillel writes, the typical person never knew which Indian tribe had fought with or defeated another, nor did anyone need to know.

Today, in contrast, we are bombarded with news and, more unfortunately, we actually believe that we need this information. Whether the topic is a war or other major world events, financial market fluctuations or just sports scores, we are afraid to be out of touch for a moment. "Can we deny that it is the handiwork of the yetzer hara to submerge us in such trivia?" asks R' Hillel.

(R' Hillel adds that even seemingly good deeds can be classified as distractions. One common example, he writes, is the temptation to study kabbalah when one should be studying more basic subjects.) (Ascending the Path Vol. II, p.20, 27)

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (died 2005) asks: How can Ramchal assert that if man would merely think about his actions, he would certainly begin to regret his deeds? He explains: Ramchal does not mean that a person will radically alter his lifestyle the moment he begins to reflect on his path. [Nor does he mean that a radical change in lifestyle is necessarily called for.] Rather, the mere act of reflecting on one's path is a radical change. A person who does not reflect about the negative aspects of his behavior or lifestyle is as one with those negative aspects. On the other hand, the mere act of

thinking about them causes one to be separate from them. In R' Wolbe's words: "Self-knowledge is itself uplifting." (Aleí Shur Vol.I p.141-142)

This Week in History, Halachah, and Minhag

20 Tevet 4965 (1204): Passing of R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam / Maimonides). Rambam was born in Spain and lived in Morocco and Eretz Yisrael before settling in Egypt. His various written works are classics in the areas of halachah / law, Mishnah commentary, and hashkafah / Jewish beliefs. He also was a practicing physician and wrote treatises on medicine.

21 Tevet: Birth of Shimon, second son of our patriarch Yaakov and matriarch Leah. He passed away on this date 120 years later. Some say that he was born and died on 28 Tevet. (Seder Ha'dorot)

This date is Purim Ancona (Italy), which celebrates the community's salvation from an earthquake in 5451 (1691). (Luach Davar B'ito p.486)

24 Tevet: On this date, the Torah law of inheritance was reinstated in Eretz Yisrael. For some time during the Greek occupation of Eretz Yisrael (during the Second Temple period), the Saducees had succeeded in corrupting the law, but after the Chashmonaim defeated the invaders, they reinstated Torah law. (Bava Batra 115b). According to Megilat Ta'anit, this event occurred on 24 Menachem Av.

On this date in 5597 (1837), an earthquake devastated the cities of Tzfat, Teveryah and Shechem, killing thousands. Later that year, R' Moshe Sofer z"l (the Chatam Sofer) eulogized the victims in Pressburg, Hungary and noted that crying over the death of a "kosher person" is a meritorious act that protects one's own family from tragedy. R' Sofer suggested, based on a letter he had received from one of the leading scholars in Eretz Yisrael and on Talmudic sources, that the earthquake was an expression of G-d's displeasure that olim were favoring the Galil over Yerushalayim, which lay in ruins. (Torat Moshe: Emor) [During the 1700s and early 1800s, olim tended to favor the areas around Tzfat due to its association with the great figures of kabbalah: R' Shimon bar Yochai and the Arizal. One of the effects of the earthquake was an influx of new settlers from the Galil and from Europe to Yerushalayim, and the beginning of Yerushalayim's expansion beyond the walls of the Old City.]

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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