

G-D'S FIRST TEACHER

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

Last week's Rabbi's Notebook ended with the following question: Included in Yakov's final blessings to his sons were references to the future births of various great personalities. During the blessing that Yakov gave Menashe and Ephraim, the Medresh Tanchumah (Rashi 48:17) explained Ephraim's importance as the progenitor of Yehoshua. At the same time Yakov revealed that Menashe would be the progenitor of Gideon. In the blessing for Yehudah Yakov revealed that King David (and therefore Mashiach) would be among his descendents. (Rashi, 49:10) When Yakov blessed Dan he revealed the era of Shimshon (Samson) the great and mighty Shofet - judge. However, conspicuously missing from the blessings was any reference to the single most important person in our history as well as the history of the world - Moshe Rabbeinu! Why wasn't there a prophetic reference concerning the birth of Moshe?

In this week's Parsha there is another glaring omission. (2:1-10) "...A man from Layvie marries a woman from Layvie... The woman became pregnant and she gave birth to a son... They saw that he was good... They hid him... They placed the child in the basket... His sister stood from the distance... What would happen to him... The daughter of Pharaoh went to bathe... They saw the child was crying... She said he must be a Jewish child... His sister said to Pharaoh's daughter... A Jewish nursemaid for the child... She called the mother of the child... Take the child and nurse him... The woman took the child and nursed him... The child grew and was brought to Pharaoh's daughter... She called him Moshe..."

Why all the mystery? Why didn't the Torah identify who were the man and woman from Layvie? Why didn't the Torah tell us the sister's name? How about Pharaoh's daughter? Why not reveal her name? Why didn't the Torah record Moshe's real name (Tuvia), the name his parents gave him at his Bris? More so, in next week's Parsha, (6:14-29) after Moshe confronted Pharaoh for the first time, the Torah identified all the key players involved in Moshe's birth except Pharaoh's daughter. If the Torah was going to tell us their names anyway, why wait till then? Why not tell us their names from the start?

The Rambam in the Laws Governing the Study of Torah (3:1) recorded the imagery of the Three Crowns.

"There were three crowns presented to the Jewish nation. a) The crown of Torah. b) The crown of Priesthood. c) The crown of Royalty. Aharon merited the crown of Priesthood. David merited the crown of Royalty. However, anyone who wishes can merit the crown of Torah."

Torah is not the exclusive right of leadership. Torah is "Morasha Kehillas Yakov - the inheritance of the congregation of Yakov" - it belongs to the entire Jewish people. The Medresh records the piercing story of the great Talmudic scholar Yanai and his encounter with a well-dressed stranger. Yanai was a wealthy man who sought to invite scholars to eat at his table. One day he invited a stranger who appeared, by virtue of his clothing and bearing, to be a Torah scholar. In the course of the meal it became embarrassingly obvious that the dignified looking stranger was completely uneducated. Yanai was extremely upset that the stranger had duped him. When the meal was over, Yanai expressed his disappointment in having invited an uneducated man to eat at his table. The stranger responded, "The verse says that Torah is the inheritance of Yakov, not the exclusive inheritance of Yanai! It is your obligation to teach me!"

Yakov's blessings last week at the end of Sefer Bereishis were intended to identify and encourage the individual strengths of the "Tribes / Brothers." At the same time, he identified some of the key historic personalities that would eventually emerge to lead the Jewish nation. I am sure that a comprehensive study of those personalities, Yehoshua, Gideon, Mashiach, and Shimshon would reveal a common denominator unique to their being grouped together. However, Moshe was not included among them. Yakov did not reveal the impending birth of Moshe, the single most important person in history.

Considering the history of jealousy and conflict leading to the sale of Yoseph, we might have thought that Yakov would have been exceedingly careful not to repeat the same negative dynamic. Yet, he pointedly placed Ephraim before his older brother Menashe. On the one hand, the intervening years, (22 + 17 = 39) may have given the brothers time to reflect and mature. However, considering the pain and suffering that they had all endured as a result of past jealousies, and considering he was about to die and would not be there to intervene, we might have expected Yakov to be more careful.

As I explained in last week's Rabbi's Notebook, Yakov gave his blessings as Yisroel, not Yakov. He spoke as the progenitor of a nation, not just the dying patriarch of a family. As such, Yakov could not afford to be "sensitive" at the expense of honesty. He was speaking as a prophet and the message was not his to alter or modify. More so than that, the brothers were gathered as individual components of a whole. Each one had to hear who and what the others were and would be so that they could support each other for the sake of the whole. They too could no longer afford to engage in pettiness, no matter how seemingly important. They too were no longer just the sons of Yakov; they had become the Bnai Yisroel.

As a nation, our *raison d'être* is to learn Torah and teach Torah. Everyone, regardless of individual talents and characteristics, share the responsibility for Torah. It should be the goal of marriages and the focus of parenting. It is the single most important characteristic and obligation differentiating us from the other nations. As we say in the morning Brachos (blessings), "He chose us from among the other nations and gave us His Torah..."

It is the nation's collective responsibility for studying and teaching Torah that explains why Yakov did not foretell the birth of Moshe. Each of the personalities revealed were identified for their uniqueness as role models for the future of the entire with their tribe and accepted by the rest of the nation as leader and savior.

Yehoshua was revealed because he would be the one to lead the nation across the Yarden. He also represented the next stage in the transmission of Torah from Moshe to the rest of history. It showed that Torah was not exclusive to Moshe. True, he brought it down from heaven, but it truly was "Morasha Kehillas Yakov - the inheritance of the congregation of Yakov." Therefore, it was appropriate that Ephraim and his tribe receive "credit" for his birth.

Gideon was one of the Shoftim - Judges who was not a great Torah scholar. As such, his leadership represented the potential for everyone in the nation to lead in a time of emergency, so long as they are 100% committed to the law of G-d as taught by those who know and understand Him best - the Rabbis. Therefore, it was appropriate that Menashe and his tribe be given "credit" for his birth.

Shimshon was exclusive among the Judges by virtue of the manner of his birth, style of leadership, and prodigious strength. In all, Shimshon was the quintessential model of G-d revealing His providence through the seemingly natural talents of humans. It wasn't Samson's strength that saved his generation from the Plishtim. It was G-d. It is not the brilliance of a given leader at a given time in history that guarantees survival and success for the Jewish people. It is the divine placement of a leader with divinely ordained talents who acknowledges the origins and obligations of his or her uniqueness that guarantees survival and success. Therefore, it was appropriate that Dan and his tribe be given "credit" for his birth.

King David and Mashiach were obvious choices for Yakov to reveal because they represent the ultimate redemption of both the nation and the world. Therefore, it was appropriate that Yehudah and his tribe be given "credit" for his birth.

However, in relation to the origins of Torah, meaning the birth of Moshe, no one Tribe can or should claim credit. Torah is divine and eternal. Torah did not emanate from within the nation or from within any single tribe. Torah came from outside the mortal framework of history and humanity. It was offered, given, granted, presented, and delivered, by G-d to the Jewish people and the world through the designated office of Moshe. Therefore, Torah does not belong to anyone and it therefore belongs to everyone. So long as we adhere to G-d's rules and regulations for studying His Torah anyone can take possession of it. So long as we respect the teachers G-d chose to teach His Torah and accept their exclusive right to interpret and apply His Torah, Torah can belong to anyone and everyone.

G-d's method for revealing His intentions for the universe and humanity was through teachers. Torah was not automatically coded into our working memories (in contrast with Angels and dented upper lips). He wanted Torah to be taught, learned, and then taught to others. Therefore, he needed a First-

Teacher to start the process. That person had to embody the entire nation. He could not be the exclusive right of any one tribe. That person was Moshe Rabbeinu. Therefore, when we are first introduced to Moshe his direct familial associations are shrouded in mystery. Instead of identifying Amram, Yocheved, and Miriam as Moshe's family, the Torah used the pronouns, man, woman, sister, mother, and child. Moshe's original name, Tuvia (among others), was not recorded because it was not important for the man who would be G-d's First-Teacher. The name Tuvia was too personal, too private; it had nothing to do with the nation as a whole. Therefore, it had no place in the story of Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher of the entire nation. Likewise, Pharaoh's daughter was just another player in the emergence of G-d's First-Teacher. She too is presented in an impersonal manner, shrouded in secrecy.

The Zohar says that Moshe, in appearance, was identical to Adam Harishon - the first human. Moshe was not just anyone. Moshe represented the quintessential human. Moshe represented the capacity of the human creature to attain divinity and become "In G-d's image." Moshe was the embodiment of the best humanity could offer and the most humanity could attain. Therefore, G-d made him look like the very first human. He appeared as the human should appear, in the form and image of his Creator. He appeared as the universal human, with universal responsibilities, and belonging equally to every single tribe.

Later, in next week's Parsha, after Moshe had assumed the role of savior, the Torah recorded his lineage. However, at that specific juncture the Torah was not specifying Moshe's lineage for the sake of Moshe or his lineage. Just the opposite! The Torah was recording G-d's search within the nation for the one person who would be G-d's First Teacher. It started with Reuven and advanced from brother to brother seeking the Redeemer. As it located the specific tribe it then made its way from son to son until locating Moshe. (The importance of the "search" had more to do with spanning the gap between Moshe and Mashiach (see Sefer Haparshios) than identifying Moshe's personal Yichus.)

Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh and Moshe's adopted mother is not identified at all. The Maharal in his commentary on the Torah offers an insight into the story of Moshe's birth that can help.

On the day of Moshe's expected birth (remember, he was born 3 months early) Pharaoh issued the decree, "Every male child is to be thrown into the river." The court astrologers had forewarned Pharaoh that the eventual savior of the Jews would be born that day. They also saw that he would eventually be destroyed through water. (The incident of hitting the rock.) However, they could not determine whether the child would be Jewish or Egyptian. Therefore, Pharaoh decreed that on that fateful day all male children Jewish and Egyptian born were to be drowned! (See Rashi, 1:22) The Maharal wondered why the astrologers were not able to determine if Moshe was Jewish or Egyptian? He explains that the day of Moshe's expected birth was the day he would be put into the river and be found by Pharaoh's daughter. Therefore, as far as the astrologers could ascertain, he was Jewish and Egyptian - Jewish by virtue of his birth and Egyptian by virtue of his adoption. Therefore, rather than stating Moshe's genetic or adoptive ancestry his birth remains in generic

obscurity, including not naming his adopted-mother.

In Divrei Hayamim (Chronicles), the Egyptian princess is identified as Basya, and she is called the mother of Yered (the name given to him by Miriam.) However, in the Torah she remains generically, "the daughter of Pharaoh." At the time that Basya found Moshe floating in the Nile, the focus was the events surrounding the birth of G-d's First-Teacher. Therefore, neither Basya nor any of the others are identified by name. At the beginning of next week's Parsha, the record of Moshe's ancestry was a search from within the nation and Basya was not a part of the nation. However, in the extended chronicles of the Torah, in Divrei Hayamim, Basya receives her due recognition as Moshe's adopted-mother.

The Maharal adds one further lesson. He points out that the astrologers were unable to identify Moshe's nation of origin because Basya had adopted him. However, he was 100% Jewish! Why did his adoption confuse the astrologers? The Maharal says, from here we learn that "if you raise an orphan in your home it is considered as if you gave birth to him. (Megilah 13a) As far as the heavens were concerned Moshe was the true child of Basya! Furthermore, we can see the degree of G-d's appreciation for an act of true Chesed - kindness. Of all the names given to Moshe, (nine all told) it was the name given to him by his adopted mother that identifies G-d's First-Teacher.

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.
