

MIRACULOUS DELIVERY

by Rabbi Yochanan Zweig

"...and she sent her maidservant and she took it" (2:5)

The Torah relates that Pharaoh's daughter Bisya went down to bathe in the Nile River, and upon seeing a basket floating amongst the reeds, "vatishlach es amasa"; the plain meaning of the text is that she sent her "amah" - "maidservant" to bring the basket to her. Citing a homiletic interpretation, the Talmud translates "amah" as "arm"; she extended her arm which became miraculously

elongated, allowing her to reach the basket.¹ It is not feasible that Bisya was aware of the pending miracle. What then was her intention when extending her arm? Why was it necessary for Moshe to be retrieved in such a miraculous manner? In Parshas Vayigash the verse states that Yaakov Avinu blessed Pharaoh.² Citing the Midrash, Rashi records that Yaakov imbued Pharaoh with the ability to control the waters of the Nile; when he would approach, the waters would rise up towards him.³ Pharaoh's daughter extended her arm to reach the basket because she was summoning the waters to rise up and deliver it. Since she was the offspring of Pharaoh she too was a beneficiary of Yaakov's blessing. To emphasize the unique nature of the child that she was retrieving, Hashem suspended her ability to summon the water and performed a miracle on Moshe's behalf.

1.Sotah 12b 2.47:10 3.Ibid

Growing Pains

"...Moshe grew up and went out to his brethren and observed their burdens..." (2:11)

The Torah relates that when Moshe grew up he went out to see the plight of his brethren. Citing the Midrash, Rashi comments "nasan einav v'libo lihiyos meitsar alaihem" - "he went out to see and experience their anguish".¹ Moshe must have been aware of the predicament which had befallen his brethren. Judaism does not promote self-flagellation. What then was gained by Moshe going out to see their pain? Rashi observes that there appears to be a redundancy in the verses. In verse ten the Torah states "and the boy grew up".² Why does the Torah in verse eleven repeat "and Moshe grew up"?³ Rashi explains that the first verse is referring to Moshe's physical growth, while the second verse is describing his ascent in status; he was given the charge over "Beis Pharaoh" - "the house of Pharaoh".⁴ In Parshas Yisro the Torah records that Hashem emancipated Bnei Yisroel from "beis

avadim" - "a house of servitude".⁵ Rashi comments that "beis avadim" refers to "Beis Pharaoh", where Bnei Yisroel were Pharaoh's direct servants.⁶ By placing Moshe in charge of Beis Pharaoh, Pharaoh was appointing Moshe as the Minister over Jewish Affairs. Since Moshe was now in a position where he could assist his brethren, he went out to see what actions he could take to ease their hardship. This interpretation is supported by the Midrash which comments on this verse that Moshe instituted that Bnei Yisroel would be given Shabbos as a day of rest.⁷

1.2:11 2.2:10 3.2:11 4.Ibid 5.20:2 6.Ibid 7.Shemos Rabbah 1:28

The Jewish Problem

"Come, let us deal wisely with them..." (1:10)

The Torah relates that the Mitzrim were afraid that Bnei Yisroel were becoming too numerous. Looming over their heads was the possibility that in the case of a war Bnei Yisroel would join forces with the enemy and drive the Mitzrim out of their land. Pharaoh and his advisors devised a course of action to prevent their worst fears from materializing. The Ba'al Haggada states "vayarei'u osanu hamitzrim" - 'the Mitzrim dealt with us in a malevolent manner', as it is recorded in the Torah 'havah nischakmah lo' - 'come let us deal wisely with them'. Why was Pharaoh's strategizing as to how to deal with a perceived threat viewed as his greatest malicious act against Bnei Yisroel? His solution and the manner in which his orders were executed should be cited as examples of his evil behavior, not his desire to protect his nation's security. In contemporary society we continuously search for methods by which we can categorize different conditions and behaviors. By identifying and labeling a problem we gain a certain confidence that the problem can be corrected. Unfortunately, often in our haste to identify a situation which we are having difficulty controlling, we mislabel a condition and create a problem where no problem exists. Particularly when dealing with children, care must be taken to ensure that we, as parents and educators, do not label our children as "problems". Even when the correct diagnosis has been made, we must proceed with caution to ensure that we do not transform a child with a problem into a "problem child". The grossest injustice that can be done to a person is to label him as a problem. The damage caused to a child's self-esteem due to the manner in which he is perceived by others and consequently comes to view himself, can be irreparable. Whereas the harm which Bnei Yisroel suffered at the hands of the Mitzrim lasted only for the duration of time they spent in servitude and affected only those who were present, the perception created by Pharaoh that Jews are a public menace still haunts us today. The ultimate act of evil perpetrated against Bnei Yisroel by Pharaoh was labeling them as "the Jewish Problem".

1.1:9,10

