

Parshas Shemos in a Nutshell

(Exodus 1:1–6:1)

The children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.

A child is born to Yocheved, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, Amram, and placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses.

As a young man, Moses leaves the palace and discovers the hardship of his brethren. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, and kills the Egyptian. The next day he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them (Tziporah), and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

(continued next column)



Mitzrayim, the Hebrew name for Egypt, relates to the Hebrew word *meitzarim* meaning "boundaries" or "limitations." In a personal sense, Egypt refers those influences that confine us and prevent us realizing our real selves.

-- The Rebbe

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On his way to Egypt he receives the G-d appears to Moses in a burning bush at the foot of Mount Sinai, and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand: "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses' brother, Aaron, is appointed to serve as his spokesman. In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe; but Pharaoh refuses to let them go, and even intensifies the suffering of Israel.

Moses returns to G-d to protest: "Why have You done evil to this people?" G-d promises that the redemption is close at hand. ❖

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Halachic Zmanim

Shabbos, Dec 25, 2021
Eastern Standard Time

Earliest Tallis 6:17 AM
Latest Morning Shema..... 9:35 AM
Earliest Mincha (Gedola) 12:21 PM
Plag Hamincha..... 3:40 PM
Earliest Evening Shema.... 5:06 PM

Anshei Lubavitch Congregation

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Adult education:

Rabbi Avrohom and Rivky Bergstein

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Rabbi Eli and Ruty Steinhauser

Shabbos Schedule

Erev Shabbos – Dec 24 / Teves 20

Candle Lighting.....4:15 pm

Mincha4:15 pm

Shabbos Day – Dec 25 / Teves 21

Shacharis..... 9:30 am*

Torah Reading 10:40 am

Kiddush 12:00 pm

Mincha4:15 pm

Rabbi's Drasha.....4:40 pm

Shabbos Ends5:20 pm

**Latest morning Shema is now 9:35 AM. Be sure to recite the Shema at or before that time (even if at home).*

Weekday Schedule (not on a holiday):

Minyan

Shacharis (Mon-Fri)6:15 am

Shacharis (Sunday) 9:00 am

Mincha (Sun-Thurs)1:45 pm

Maariv (Sun-Thurs)9:15 pm

Bulletin

*This week's Bulletin
is sponsored by
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Chassidic Masters

Moshiach's Donkey

*Based on the teachings of
the Lubavitcher Rebbe
Courtesy of MeaningfulLife.com*

*And Moses took his wife and
children, set them upon the donkey,
and returned to the land of Egypt
-- Exodus 4:20*

The prophet Zechariah describes Moshiach as "a pauper, riding on a donkey." The simple meaning of the verse is that Moshiach — whom the Midrash describes as "greater than Abraham, higher than Moses, and loftier than the supernal angels" (Yalkut Shimoni after Isaiah 52:13) — is the epitome of self-effacement. Indeed, humility is the hallmark of the righteous: they recognize that their tremendous talents and achievements, and the power vested in them as leaders, are not theirs but their Creator's. They live not to realize and fulfill themselves, but to serve the divine purpose of creation.

On a deeper level, Moshiach's donkey represents the essence of the messianic process: a process that began with the beginning of time and which constitutes the very soul of history. In the beginning, the Torah tells us, when G-d created the heavens and the earth, when the universe was still empty, unformed, and shrouded in darkness, the spirit of G-d hovered above the emerging existence. Says the Midrash: "'The spirit of G-d hovered' — this is the spirit of Moshiach." For Moshiach represents the divine spirit of creation — the vision of the perfected world that is G-d's purpose in creating it and

populating it with willful, thinking and achieving beings.

Moshiach's donkey has a long, prestigious history. Time and again it makes its appearance through the generations, surfacing at key junctures of the messianic process. Each time we see it fulfilling the same function, but in a slightly different manner — reflecting the changes our world undergoes as it develops toward its ultimate state of perfection.

Abraham, Moses, and Moshiach

Moshiach's donkey first appears in the year 2084 from creation (1677 bce), as Abraham heads for the "Binding of Isaac", his tenth and greatest reiteration of his faith in G-d. "Abraham rose early in the morning and readied his donkey," the Torah relates (Genesis 22:3), and loaded it with supplies for the Binding (the wood, the fire, and the knife) for the three-day trek from Hebron to Mount Moriah in Jerusalem.

Seven generations later, Moses was also dispatched on a mission by G-d: to take the Jewish people out of Egypt and bring them to Mount Sinai, where I shall communicate to them their mission in life as My chosen people. So "Moses took his wife and children, set them upon the donkey, and set out for Egypt." The donkey, stresses the Torah — the very same donkey, our sages explain, that served Abraham and that will bear Moshiach.

Abraham, Moses and Moshiach — three who employ this erstwhile donkey in their fulfillment of G-d's will. But the extent to which the donkey is involved in their mission differs.

With Abraham, it carries his supplies; with Moses, his wife and children; while Moshiach is described as himself riding the donkey.

The Rescinded Decree

Conventional wisdom has it that the spiritual is greater than the physical, the ethereal more lofty than the material. Nevertheless, our sages have taught that G-d created the entirety of existence, including the most lofty spiritual worlds, because "He desired a dwelling in the lower world." Our physical existence is the objective of everything He created, the environment within which His purpose in creation is to be realized.

G-d desired that we refine and elevate the material existence; that the physical reality, whose concreteness and self-centeredness obscure our inner vision and distort our true priorities, be redirected as a positive force in our lives; that we bring to light the goodness and perfection inherent in all of His creation, including — and especially — the lowliest of His works, the material world.

The Hebrew word for donkey is chamor from the word chomer, material. Moshiach's donkey is the material beast harnessed, the physical directed to higher and loftier ends.

But humanity's mission of elevating the material entails a long and involved process, an historic effort in which each generation builds upon the attainments of its predecessors.

(Continued next page)

For the physical and the spiritual are worlds apart; indeed, the very nature of G-d's creation is such that a vast gulf divides the two, making them natural antagonists. By nature, almost by definition, a person devoted to spiritual pursuits shuns the material, while material life coarsens a person's soul and dulls his or her spiritual sensitivity. Only when G-d descended on Mount Sinai was the wall between spirit and matter breached. The divine reality revealed itself within the earthly reality; the Torah was given to man, enabling him to sanctify the mundane, to express the all-pervading truth of G-d within, and via, the material world.

The Midrash uses the following parable to explain the significance of the event:

Once there was a king who decreed: "The people of Rome are forbidden to journey to Syria, and the people of Syria are forbidden to journey to Rome." Likewise, when G-d created the world He decreed: "The heavens are G-d's, and the earth is given to man" (Psalms 115:16). But when He wished to give the Torah to Israel, He rescinded His original decree, and declared: "The lower realms may ascend to the higher realms, and the higher realms may descend to the lower realms. And I, Myself, will begin" — as it is written, "And G-d descended on Mount Sinai," and then it says, "And to Moses He said: 'Go up to G-d'."

This explains the difference in the extent to which Abraham and Moses involved the material donkey in their respective missions. Abraham, the first Jew, began the process of sublimating the material, of realizing its potential to express the goodness and perfection of the Creator. But Abraham lived before the revelation at Sinai, before G-d rescinded the decree that had divided the world between higher and lower, between matter and spirit. In his day, the original order instituted at creation still held sway: the physical and the spiritual were two separate, incompatible worlds. The most Abraham could do was to harness the physical to serve the spiritual, to use the donkey to carry the accessories of his divine service. The physical remained as coarse as ever and could not directly be involved in his spiritual life; nevertheless, Abraham took the first step in wresting the material from its inherent self-absorption by utilizing it, albeit peripherally, to assist in his service of G-d.

Moses, on the other hand, was embarking on the mission that was to culminate in his receiving the Torah, the medium by which G-d empowered man to dissolve the dichotomy between the higher and lower domains. The Torah instructs and enables us to sanctify even the most mundane aspects of our lives, to integrate our material selves and environment in our spiritual goals. So Moses used the donkey to carry his wife and children. A person's wife and children are an extension of his own self — in the words of our sages, "a person's wife is like his own body" (Talmud, Berachot 24a) and "a child is a limb of his father" (ibid., Eruvin 70b). Beginning with Moses, the material began to play a central and intimate role in our life's work.

But Moses marks only the beginning of Torah's effect on the physical world. Ever since, whenever a person uses a material resource to perform a mitzvah — e.g. giving money to charity, using the energy his body extracts from his food to fuel his fervor in prayer — he "refines" these physical objects, divesting them of their mundanity and selfishness. With each such act, the physical world becomes that much holier, that much more in harmony with its essence and function. Each such act brings closer the day when our world will finally and completely shed the husk of coarseness that is the source of all ignorance and strife, bringing on a new dawn of universal peace and perfection.

So Moshiach, who represents the ultimate fulfillment of Torah, himself rides the donkey of the material. For he heralds a world in which the material is no longer the lower or secondary element, but an utterly refined resource, no less central and significant a force for good than the most spiritual creation. ❖

Many of us are "slaves in Egypt." We are forced to work hours and days at tasks that dull - rather than enhance - our awareness of our inner spiritual nature.

There is more to our lives than the material reality that meets our eye. That's what leaving Egypt is about. In each generation - and in a certain sense, on every day - we must experience an exodus from Egypt. We must step beyond these constricting influences and give expression to the fundamental spark of G-d that every one of us possesses.

-- The Rebbe

From Our Sages

And these are the names of the children of Israel who came into Egypt . . . Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah (Exodus 1:1–2)

Although G-d had already counted them in their lifetime, He again counted them at the time of their death, to express His love for them. For they are like the stars, which He takes out and brings in by number and name, as it is written (Isaiah 40:26): “He takes out their hosts by number; He calls them each by name.”

-- (Rashi)

There arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph (Exodus 1:8)

Some say it was actually a new king; others say that it was the same king with new decrees. “Who knew not Joseph”—who acted as if he did not know Joseph (since, in either case, he surely knew about Joseph and his salvation of Egypt).

-- (Talmud; Rashi)

Let us deal wisely with them (Exodus 1:10)

Pharaoh himself took hold of a basket and shovel; all who saw Pharaoh with a basket and shovel, and working in bricks, did likewise. The Jews came too, and diligently worked with him all day, for they were strong and brawny. When evening fell, Pharaoh placed taskmasters over them, and said: “Count how many bricks they made.” He then said to the Hebrews: “This number you shall deliver to me each and every day,” appointing the Egyptian taskmasters over Hebrew officers, and the Hebrew officers over the people.

-- (Midrash Tanchuma)

Every son that is born you shall cast into the River, and every daughter you shall make live (Exodus 1:22)

Pharaoh did not merely allow the Jewish girls to live; he commanded to “make them live” (techayun, in the Hebrew).

Pharaoh’s decree of annihilation against the Jewish people consisted of two parts: to throw every Jewish newborn male into the Nile, and to make live every female. The boys were to be physically murdered. The girls were to be murdered spiritually by making them live the Egyptian life, by indoctrinating them into the perverse lifestyle of Egypt.

The boys were to be drowned in the Nile. The girls, too, were to be drowned in the Nile—conceptually, if not actually. The Nile, which irrigated the fields of rain-parched Egypt, was the mainstay of its economy and its most venerated god. The girls were to be raised in this cult of the river, their souls submerged in a way of life that deifies the earthly vehicle of material sustenance.

In our own day, the Pharaoh-instituted practice of drowning children in the Nile is still with us: there are still parents whose highest consideration in choosing a school for their children is how it will further their child’s economic prospects when the time will come for him or her to enter the job market.

The people of Israel survived the Egyptian galut because there were Jewish mothers who refused to comply with Pharaoh’s decree to submerge their children in his river. If we are to survive the present galut, we too must resist the dictates of the current Pharaohs. We must set the spiritual and moral development of our children, rather than their future “earning power” and “careers,” as the aim of their education.

-- (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

Haftorah for Shemos in a nutshell

Isaiah 27:6–28:13; 29:22–23

This week's haftorah parallels the week's Torah reading on many levels. One of the parallels is the message of redemption conveyed by Isaiah—"and you shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel"—that is reminiscent of the message of redemption that G-d spoke to Moses at the burning bush, a message that Moses then communicated to Pharaoh.

The haftorah vacillates between Isaiah's prophecies concerning the future redemption, and his admonitions concerning the Jews' drunken and G-dless behavior. Isaiah starts on a positive note: "In the coming days, Jacob will take root, Israel will bud and blossom, filling the face of the earth . . ." He mentions G-d's mercy for His nation, and the measure-for-measure punishment He meted out upon the Egyptians who persecuted them. And regarding the future redemption: "You shall be gathered one by one, O children of Israel. And it will come to pass on that day that a great shofar will be sounded, and those lost in the land of Assyria and those exiled in the land of Egypt will come, and they will prostrate themselves before the L-rd on the holy mount in Jerusalem."

The prophet then proceeds to berate the drunkenness of the Ten Tribes, warning them of the punishment that awaits them. "With the feet they shall be trampled, the crown of the pride of the drunkards of Ephraim . . ."

The haftorah ends on a positive note: "Now Jacob will no longer be ashamed, and now his face will not pale. For when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in his midst, who shall sanctify My name . . . and the G-d of Israel they will revere." ❖



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Good Shabbos to all!