

## Parshas Shemos - 5781

Last week, I think the sentiment that all of us shared was, “Baruch Hashem, 2020 is over and G-d willing, 2021 will be a better year. It can’t possibly get any worse. The vaccine is on the way, so things are looking up.” But like the *pasuk* in Mishlei (19:21) states: רבות מחשבות בלב איש – There are many thoughts in a person’s head, ועצת ה' היא תקום – but the counsel of Hashem, it will prevail. After witnessing the events that took place in the Capital this week, I don’t think there is much to do or say other than shake our heads in disbelief. Who would have ever thought that they would witness such an event? When did society fall apart that this could happen? Undoubtedly, everyone has their theory on the matter, but for all of the theories, undoubtedly, rooted in and conforming to our preexisting attitudes, the question remains, how did this happen? The more difficult, challenging and uncomfortable question is, where do we go from here? What will be the next step? Can things turn around and return to “normal” or have we crossed the line of no return and things will never be the same? There are all sorts of expectations of what will happen in the next couple of weeks and months but if we are going to be honest with ourselves, one lesson that we should have learned over the past nine months is that we do not know very much.

The one thing that we can say with certainty is that this is a transitional moment in history. We don’t know for sure what we are transitioning towards and what the future will bring, but things are changing. Interestingly and perhaps not surprisingly, this week’s *parsha* addresses transitional moments as well. At the beginning of the *parsha* the Torah relates (Shemos 1:8): ויקם מלך חדש – And a new king arose. Rashi quotes the Gemara in Sotah (11a) that records a dispute regarding the meaning of this *pasuk*. One opinion maintains that it was an actual new king that took the throne, and the second opinion contends that it was the same old king, but he adopted new policies. Rather than appreciating Yosef’s contribution to the rise of the Egyptian Empire and the essential role that he played, the king changed his policy and would no longer show appreciation to Yosef and his family. Instead, it was now time to treat them as potential enemies and they must be handled as enemies of the state.

The second transition takes place at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> *perek* where the Torah states (Shemos 2:23): ויהי בימים הרבים ההם – And it was after these many days, וימת מלך מצרים – the king of Egypt died. The *pesukim* then relate that after the Jewish People called out to Hashem, He heard their cries, He remembered the covenant, He saw the Jewish People and He made it His business to be aware of their circumstance.

What is interesting is that the first transition led towards suffering and years of unimaginable torture. The second transition was the beginning of the salvation. Take

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note, however, that in the first transition, where the Torah tells us that the “new king” adopted new policies, there was no response from the Jewish People. The Torah relates the conversation that Pharaoh had with the Egyptian people and the murderous instructions that Pharaoh issued to the Jewish midwives, but the Jewish People are mysteriously silent. They are suffering and forced into slave labor and yet, the Torah does not inform us that they cried out to Hashem for assistance or salvation. In contrast, in the second transition, we are told that the previous king died. The Torah does not talk about a new king taking over the throne<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, we know nothing about the new king’s policies. All the Torah shares is that the previous king died and the Jew’s began to cry out to Hashem. As far as I can tell, this is the first time that the Jewish People cried out for salvation. What made them cry at this point? Maybe things would get better or perhaps remain consistent and if they didn’t cry out to Hashem yet, what made them cry out to Hashem now?

Perhaps the Jewish People learned from experience. In the first transition, it seemed, at first, that the “new” Pharaoh was merely adopting new policies. How bad could it be? No more annual dinners honoring Yosef. That is not a reason for alarm. Shortly afterwards, they realized that what was initially a minor shift in policy became a fundamental shift and they went from being a privileged people to slaves. Now that Pharaoh died, before even waiting to announce the new king or wait to hear his 100-day agenda, they realized that anything could happen. It could get better or it could get worse. They understood that they had transitioned into the unknown. That itself became the impetus for their prayer. They cried out to Hashem to express their pain and anguish. The next *pesukim* report that Hashem heard their cries and by remembering the covenant, He laid the groundwork for the salvation of the Jewish People.

Without speculating and prophesizing what the future will bring, whether in the immediate future of the next couple of weeks or whether in the long-term future, we are in a time of transition and ultimately, we do not know what will happen and what is coming. I am sure everyone has an opinion about what is coming and likely, you will share it with me 😊, but the bottom line is that we don’t know. We should, however, take a lesson from this week’s *parsha*. When we find ourselves in a transitional moment and do not know what the future will bring, our response is to call out to Hashem. In

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<sup>1</sup> See Rashi 2:23 *ד"ה וימת מלך מצרים* where he writes that the king did not die. He became afflicted with *tzara'as* which is equated with death. It could be that Rashi subscribes to this view because the Torah does not mention anything about the new king.

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the relevant *pesukim* the Torah uses four different forms of the word *tefilla*, ויאנחו – and they groaned; ויזעקו – and they cried out, שועתם – their outcry and נאקתם – moaning. Specifically, when the future is unknown is when we are reminded אין לנו להשען אלא על אבינו שבשמים – We have no one to rely upon other than our Father in Heaven. The future and safety of Israel, the USA and Jews throughout the world are in a transitional phase. We certainly need to continue to make efforts to a secure a safe future, but we must also recognize that ultimately, we are in Hashem's hands and we must turn towards Him for our safety and well-being.

I ask that we all make a more concerted effort to *daven* for the well-being of our families, the Jewish People, The State of Israel, the US as well as world peace.

**This week's Drashos are Tally and Aaron Marcus in honor of  
Tally's father's Yahrzeit, Shlomo Ben Itzchak Halevi, Dr. Shlomo  
Moskovits z"l**

To sponsor future drashos, please contact Ralph Siegel ([ralph@siegel5.com](mailto:ralph@siegel5.com)) or Ellen Cohen ([ecohen1916@gmail.com](mailto:ecohen1916@gmail.com))

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