

Shmos - Rabbi Lerner - December 30, 2012

The Birth of Moshe

2:1: *A man went (Vayelech) from the House of Levi and he took a daughter of Levi.* The Torah is usually very specific, telling us names of people, and here it is shrouded in mystery. Why are their names camouflaged here?

2:2: *The woman conceived and gave birth to a son. She saw that he was good and she hid him for three months.* If he wasn't good would she have given him up to the Egyptians? Every baby is good in the eyes of its mother. And why start off talking about their third child instead of the first two?

Rashi: the Gemorrah in Sota describes how Amram had separated from Yocheved because of the decree of Pharaoh to kill all the male infants. She is the direct daughter of Levi, the direct granddaughter of Yaacov, not just a descendant of Levi. Amram had separated from his wife, and now took her back because of Miriam's intervention. It was already bitter for the Jews during the time of her birth - hence her name, which comes from the word bitter. She was 5 or 6 at this time of Moshe's birth. When she was born the persecution was already heavy - but it worsened during her first few years of life, with the decree of infanticide. This decree sent terror through the hearts and minds of all of the Jews, and rather than have a 50-50 chance of a child living, Amram, the Gadol Hador, decided not to take the chance, and he separated from his wife - many others followed his example. In this pasuk he takes her back as a wife for second time - that is what is meant by Vayelech. What made him reconsider was the influence of Miriam who told her father that his action was worse than Pharaoh, for he was decreeing against the complete Jewish population instead of half. He married her for a second time and she became young again - it was a great miracle for her to have any of her children, since she is now 130 years old. Moshe was 80 when the Jews left Egypt, and they were in Egypt for 210 years. She was born as they entered the land of Egypt, counted as the 70th person; so she must have been 130 when she gave birth to him. This is a greater miracle than with Sarah who was 89 when she conceived. So, Amram defied the decree with tremendous courage, and from there comes Moshe.

Ibn Ezra: It says Vayelech because the Jews lived in many different cities; there were tremendous numbers of the Jews, and they lived throughout the land of Goshen, in many cities. Vayelech means that he was living in one city, while she lived in another. He went from where he was to where she was. The Torah is just focusing on the main person, Moshe.

Ramban: Disagrees with the Ibn Ezra - Vayelech doesn't mean that he had to travel from where he was to where she was - why would the Torah find it necessary to say that he had to travel to marry her? It is of no importance and the Torah wouldn't go out of its way to say this. Instead, since he showed defiance of Pharaoh's decree and went to take a woman to have children, the word Vayelech is used - it is not just about movement - it means movement with courage and idealism; he went with tremendous faith in Hashem, despite the many reasons not to do so. He was going with courage and fortitude and Bitachon. So why doesn't it mention that there are two previous children from this marriage? There is no set order in the Torah - this happened at the beginning of the marriage, when it was already difficult for the Jews.

Netziv: Vayelech - he, from the third or later generation, took the daughter of Levi, a second generation child. She was much older than he. It was not common for an old woman to marry a young man. He is doing it because of her yichus - Levi is the spiritual tribe, and they act

with tremendous ruach hakodesh. They saw special importance and holiness and potential in this union. Vayelech means he went against the mainstream with this marriage.

Kli Yakar: there is a remez in the words themselves to suggest this was the second time they wed. It just says Vayelech - it should have said Vayelech Ish Levi instead of mebais Levi. Vayelech is the language of divorce in the Torah. Likewise, a woman is often referred to as the house. The phrase here - *Vayelech Ish Mibais* - means he left and divorced her. The second part of the pasuk, with the word Vayikach, means he retook her as a wife. When it says Mibais Levi it means a husband and wife together - Levi was given that name by Leah to indicate that now her husband would stay with her. The Kli Yakar says this pasuk suggests the back and forth of their divorce and subsequent remarriage.

Rav Yaacov Kaminetsky: In this pasuk there is a tremendous pillar of our belief in Hashem. Unlike the gentiles, when they wanted to create a holy law-giver who was bigger than life, they had to create a miracle for the birth of their leader - that it was a virgin birth. That is how they paved the way for their new religion. It had to be that way because they could not reconcile holiness coming from the physical; they could not see the sexual act leading to a messiah, a holy person. So they created the notion of a miraculous birth. When it comes to the Jewish people, however, it is just the opposite. The Torah goes out of its way to emphasize that this great holy person came about from an ordinary marriage. We believe there is a strong connection between the body and soul - the neshamah is embedded in the body to raise it to a higher level. The goyim cannot reconcile the two - they feel the soul is separate from the body. We believe the body becomes holy because of the soul.

Why are their identities hidden? **Rav Hirsch**: From this point in the Torah is an unprecedented mission of leading a nation out of bondage to become the nation of God, and it was important to establish their human origins. The yichus is spelled out in perek 6, where at the beginning of their mission, the Torah tells us that they originate from two people with ordinary human nature. The Torah does not invest in people a godly origin after their death to explain their mission and lives, as the goyim do. Our Torah emphasizes that Moshe was a man, born of man, who achieved incredible godliness. Greatness can spring from ordinary people without having to fabricate a miraculous origin. Moshe came from the normal way, just as every other human being springs forth.

Why does the Torah not tell us their identities here? **Rav Baruch Simon**: there is a machlokes about this. **Maharal**: The reason the Torah starts off without identifying his parents is because Moshe, because of his greatness, was separate and apart from every other human being in the world; no one else had his power of miracles, no one else spoke to God face to face, etc... He was on a completely different level. If the Torah had identified that he was born from regular people, then we would think he is like everyone else. The Torah camouflaged his parents to say that he was different from everyone else. He reached heights that no one else reached, and was headed in a different path, to reach a mysterious level. The Torah hints that by not telling us here who is his parents. This explanation is the opposite of Rav Hirsch. The **Tiferes Yisrael** in the Gemorrah Kedushin says that when Moshe was traveling through the desert with the Jewish people, a foreign king who had heard of all of the miracles and greatness of Moshe sent his artist, to meet with and draw Moshe's face - their wise men were able to discern the characteristics of a person from studying an accurate picture of that person. He wanted a portrait because from one's facial features, experts can figure out a person's character. When the artist drew and submitted the picture, the wise men said that this man had a very bad character - he is arrogant, has tremendous desire for wealth, he does what he wants, he has the worst character traits. This is

what they concluded from the drawing. The king was furious and asked whether his wise men were mocking him? He had heard just the opposite about this very holy man and could not believe their conclusion. The king decided that either they were not wise men, or the artist drew a poor portrait. So he journeyed to the desert and when he saw Moshe, he realized that the portrait had captured Moshe's face accurately. He told Moshe that his wise men must be fools. Moshe told the king not to be angry at his experts, that they were in fact correct. Moshe said, "you should know that if it was true about his attributes, he would be like a dried up piece of wood. All of the deficiencies and poor character traits they described were 100% accurate; in fact, they didn't even say enough - there are more negative things about his character. But with tremendous power he overcame his nature. He worked like a dog to polish the rough edges and make himself who he was. He completely created a new character - this is what made him so precious in the heavens above. So we see that started off with the worse character traits, but with constant effort, he subdued his desires. The meforshim say on this basis, that is why he became a model for us. The Torah submerges his identity to hide his tremendous yichus and merit of his ancestors, to say that Moshe made himself who he was - it had nothing to do with his parents; even coming from the greatest of parents he was the most horrible of children; but he had to overcome his nature.

2:2: *She saw that he was good.* **Rashi:** The house was filled with light. **Kli Yakar:** it was the light of creation, a spiritual light. She saw there was potential for Moshe to be great; that is what made her say there was something special with this child, and it was worth the effort of placing him in danger in the Nile to try to save his life. It was worth risking everything to place him in a raft in the Nile. A more simple peshat is that, as Rashi says, he was three months premature and could have been in great danger because of that - she saw that he was much stronger and more resilient than his age would have warranted. She had three months to hide him and then placed him into the Nile.

2:3-6: *She could not hide him any longer, so she took for him a wicker basket and smeared it with clay and pitch; she placed the child into it and placed it among the reeds at the bank of the river. His sister stationed herself at a distance to know what would be done with him. Pharaoh's daughter went down to bathe by the River and her maidens walked along the River. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant and she took it. She opened it and saw him, the child (Yeled), and behold, a youth (Na'ar) was crying...* How did she know it was a Jewish baby? Because placing a child in a basket in the river was a desperate act to save a child - only the Jews would do this. Others say she looked at the child and saw that he was circumcised. **Abarbanel:** she opened the cradle and the Torah calls him a Yeled; when he cries he is a Na'ar. The Na'ar was Aharon - he also went along with Miriam to see what would happen to Moshe. He was crying about his kid brother; she saw Aharon crying and realized this was a Jewish child. It was Aharon crying, not Moshe.

Rav Nissan Alpert: from both Yocheved and Batya he was inculcated with a tremendous mesiras nefesh that influenced his whole life. Yocheved risked her life and showed courage in having a child and then going out of her way to get around Pharaoh's decree; Batya risked her life when she counteracted her father's decree and saved the child. Moshe's whole life was about mesiras nefesh, as he was constantly prepared to give up his life - to save other Jews, to save strangers. All of this he learned from this two mothers. That is why he is called Moshe instead of Mashoi - not that he was drawn out of the waters, but that he draws others out of the water to save them.