

Good Shabbos, everyone.

As we do every year, our Shomrei Israel Committee is collecting funds to help support the Big Brother Program in the Talmud Torah, Hadar Yosef, in our sister city of Eli. This program helps fund mentors and activities for the children of soldiers who are away from home protecting the country. It is our opportunity to participate in the *zechus* of *chesed* on the level of “*nosei b’ol im chavero*.” When I have visited Israel in the past, I have made it a point to visit Eli and meet with school administrators and teachers and some of the children who participate in the program. I have been extremely impressed by the school and those involved in this initiative. Please join me in supporting this worthy cause by dropping off a check made out to Shomrei Israel Fund or donating online. Also, please look in the bulletin and emails about a special program and tour on zoom with our friends from Eli.

The **Medrash**, in *Shir Hashirim Rabba*, tells a story of the great Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, known simply as “Rebbi,” who lived approximately 1,900 years ago. He was giving a *drasha* to his students and was faced with a distressing problem; they were falling asleep, (apparently this is not a new problem)...

שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה א:ג רבי היה יושב ודורש ונתנמנם הציבור, בקש לעוררן...

Rebbi was sitting and teaching, and his students began to fall asleep. He wanted to awaken them.

He wanted them to wake up and pay attention! But how do you awaken sleeping students or a drowsy congregation??

There are many approaches (none of them perfect). Some rabbis and teachers raise their voices, hoping the decibel level will keep people awake. Others turn to sensational news or controversial topics, or they “keep it light” with interesting current events or humor.

Rebbi decided on a different approach; he decided to shock them; to try to teach them a profound lesson in a dramatic way. He proclaimed:

אמר: ילדה אשה אחת במצרים ששים רבוא בכרס אחת

“In Mitzrayim one woman gave birth to 600,000 in a single pregnancy.”

והיה שם תלמיד אחד ורבי ישמעאל ברבי יוסי שמו אמר ליה מאן הוה כן,

One student, Rabbi Yishmael, the son of Rabbi Yossi, asked “who was this amazing woman?”

Rebbi responded

אמר ליה זו יוכבד שילדה את משה ששקול כנגד ששים רבוא של ישראל, הה"ד (שמות ט"ו) אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל (במדבר א')

It was Yocheved who gave birth to Moshe Rabbeinu, who was as worthy as 600,000. Indeed, the Medrash points out that Moshe Rabbeinu impacted and influenced the entire Jewish people.

He then cited a *Pasuk* in our *Parsha* to prove this point אז ישיר משה ובני ישראל, Moshe led the entire nation in singing, followed by other *Pesukim* which illustrate that point.

What is the deeper lesson in this *Medrash*? Let us start with a basic question on the *Medrash*: Why give us the background to the *drasha*? Why tell us that Rebbe’s *talmidim* were sleeping? I believe the *Medrash* is communicating a message. Rebbi’s *talmidim* were not literally falling asleep—instead they were stagnating--accomplishing much less than they could, sleepwalking through life.

Here is the imagery of slumber presented by **Rambam in Hilchos Teshuva 3,4**

אף על פי שתקיעת שופר בראש השנה גזרת הכתוב רמז יש בו כלומר עוררו ישנים משנתכם ונרדמים הקיצו מתרדמתכם וחפשו במעשיכם וחרו בתשובה וזכרו בוראכם. אלו השוכחים את האמת בהבלי הזמן ושוגים כל שנתם בהבל וריק אשר לא יועיל ולא יציל,

Notwithstanding that the blowing of the ram's horn trumpet on Rosh ha-Shanah is a Scriptural statute, its blast is symbolic, as if saying: “Ye that sleep, bestir yourselves from your sleep, and ye slumbering, emerge from your slumber, examine your conduct, turn in repentance, and remember your Creator! They that forget the truth because of the vanities of the times, who err all of their years by pursuing vanity and idleness, which are of neither benefit nor of salvation.

Rebbi wanted to inspire them to find the extra strength to push themselves to do more...to wake up spiritually and fulfill their potential. He said to them "Look at how much one person can accomplish in a lifetime. Look at the accomplishments of one mother who was brave enough to have a child during unprecedented times; look at what one child was able to accomplish" Push yourselves to do more; don't go through life as if you are falling asleep!

Indeed, Jewish history is filled with the "small decisions" of individuals, that have had a major impact...individuals who have inspired and affected Jewish history.

--Imagine what Jewish history would look like if Yocheved and Amram had decided to stay divorced and had not had more children.

--Imagine what Jewish history would look like if Moshe had stayed in Paraoth's comfortable palace, or just "walked on by" the burning bush and not stopped to inspect it.

--Imagine what Jewish history would look like if the Jews in Mitzrayim, who originally would not listen to Moshe because they were tired and weary, had not found the inspiration to "wake up" and join his journey.

--Imagine what Jewish history would look like if ordinary men and women throughout the ages had chosen to stay home when destiny called upon them. If they had given in to their natural inertia to stay at rest.

What *Mesillas Yesharim* describes in Chapter 6

תראה כי טבע האדם כבד מאד, כי עפריות החמריות גס, על כן לא יחפוץ האדם בטורח ומלאכה. ומי שרוצה לזכות לעבודת הבורא יתברך, צריך שיתגבר נגד טבעו עצמו ויתגבר ויזדרז. שאם הוא מניח עצמו ביד כבודותו, ודאי הוא שלא יצליח. והוא מה שאמר התנא (אבות ה, כ):
הוי עז כנמר, וקל כנשר, וריץ כצבי, וגבור כארי לעשות רצון אביך שבשמים. וכן מנו חכמים ז"ל (ברכות לב): בדברים הצריכים חיזוק, תורה ומעשים טובים. ומקרא מלא הוא (יהושע א): חזק ואמץ מאד לשמר לעשות ככל התורה אשר צוך משה עבדי, כי חיזוק גדול צריך למי שרוצה לכפות הטבע אל הפכו.

You can observe that man's nature weighs very heavily upon him. For the earthiness of the physical is gross. Therefore a man does not want to exert himself and labor. But he who wants to merit to the service of the Creator must strengthen himself against his own nature, mustering strength and zeal. If he leaves himself in the hands of his [natural] heaviness, it is a certainty that he will not succeed. This is what the Tana (Mishnaic sage) stated: "be brazen as a leopard, light as an eagle, swift as a deer, and mighty as a lion to do the will of your Father in Heaven" (Avos 5:20). Likewise, the Sages counted among the things which need strengthening: "Torah and good deeds" (Berachos 32b). This is explicitly stated in scripture: "be strong and very courageous [to observe and do all of the Torah...]" (Yehoshua 1:6). For great strengthening is needed for one who wants to bend his nature to its opposite.

The effect one person can have is reflected in a *Medrash*, a *Mechilta*, commenting on an unusual word at the beginning of our *Parsha*. The Torah tells us (*Shemos* 13:18)

שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יג פסוק יח

(יח) ויִסֹּב אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָעָם דֶּרֶךְ הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וְחַמְשִׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם:

God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up "chamushim" out of the land of Egypt.

Hashem took the Jews out of Egypt via a long route through the desert, instead of the direct route to Israel, because if the newly-freed slaves were faced with war, they would want to return to Egypt. The next words are "The Children of Israel went up from Egypt *chamushim*." What does this last word mean, and how does it relate to the context? **Rashi**, following the *Mechilta*, gives two opinions.

רש"י שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יג פסוק יח

החמשים - אין חמושים אלא מזויינים. דבר אחר חמושים אחד מחמשה יצאו, וארבעה חלקים מתו בשלשת ימי אפילה:

First, the simple reading of *chamushim* is "armed." Second, the more drastic opinion in Rashi and the *Mechilta* is that *chamushim* comes from the word for five, *chamesh*, and that only one in five Jews left Egypt. And, believe it or not, the one-in-five opinion is the most conservative one in the *Mechilta*. The full text reads:

מכילתא דרבי שמעון בר יוחאי (אפשטיין-מלמד) שמות פרשת בשלה פרק יג פסוק יח

ד"א וחמושים עלו שלא עלו עמהם אחד מחמשה ויש אומרים אחד מחמשים ויש אומרים אחד מחמש מאות. ר' נוהראי אומר העבודה ולא אחד מחמשת אלפים וכן הוא אומר רבבה כצמח השדה נתתיך (יחז' טז ז) ואימתי מתו בימי האפילה שהיו מצרים שרויין בחשך וישראל מקברין מיתיהן והודו ושיבחו לשם שלא ראו שונאיהן ושמהו בפורענותו.

Another opinion: "Chamushim went up" means one in five. Some say one in fifty. Some say one in five hundred. Rabbi Nehorai says: "[I swear by] the Temple Service! It was not one in five hundred that went out [but one in five thousand]. It says, 'I made you into myriads like the grass of the field' (Yechezkel 15:7), and it says, 'The Children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and multiplied and became huge' (Shemos 1:6) – a woman would give birth to six at one time. And you say that one in five hundred went out?! [I swear by] the Temple Service! It was not one in five hundred that went out [but fewer]. Rather, many Jews died in Egypt. When did they die? During the three days of darkness, as it says, 'People could not see each other' (Shemos 10:23). They were burying their dead, and they thanked and praised Hashem that their enemies could not see and rejoice at their downfall."

Talk about depressing! This *Medrash* asserts that the vast, vast majority of the Jewish people – whether 80%, 98%, 99.8%, or even more – did not leave Egypt. Why not? *Shemos Rabba* explains that "There were sinners among the Jews who had Egyptian patrons, and they had wealth and honor there, so they didn't want to leave."

But is it possible that millions of people really died?

In Ma'ayan Beis HaShoevah, Rav Shimon Schwab suggests a reinterpretation of the *Mechilta*:

ונראה לפרש דבר זה ע"פ דברי רש"י על הפסוק (בראשית ד, י) "קול דמי אחיך צועקים אלי מן האדמה" שפירשו חז"ל (סנהדרין לז). "דמי אחיך" דמו ודם זרעיותיו. וכן יש לומר כאן, שבאמת לא מתו אלא יחידים, שהיו בבני ישראל כמה רשעים גמורים שלא היו רואים לגאולה, והם מתו בשלשת ימי אפילה, אבל אם היו נשאים בחיים היו מולידים כמה מליונים אנשים במשך הדורות, ואל זה נחלקו בעלי המדרש, אם היו יוצאי חלציהם ארבעה פעמים ששים רבוא או ארבעים ותשע פעמים או ארבע מאות ותשעים ותשעה פעמים (ויתכן שנחלקו איך לעשות החשבון, אם משעת יציאת מצרים עד בנין בית המקדש או עד סוף כל הדורות או ד לאיזה שיעור אחר) והוכחה ברורה לדברינו, היא ממה שפירש רש"י שמתו בשלשת ימי אפילה, ולמה לא מתו בזמן אחר, אלא שלא רצה הקבה שהמצרים ירגישו שמתו מבני ישראל, ולכן מתו וגם נקברו בשעת האפילה ולא רגישו המצרים כלל בהעדרם. ואמנם אם נפרש את המדרש כפשוטו, שרובם של בני ישראל מתו באותה תקופה, בודאי אי אפשר שלא הרגישו המצריים בחסרון עצום כזה. אלא הדבר רר כמו שפירשנו, שבאמת רק יחידים מתו ולא היה מורגש חסרון גדול בגגופו של כלל ישראל.

It seems [possible] to explain this based on Rashi on the verse [after Kayin kills Hevel], "The sound of your brother's blood calls to Me from the earth" (Bereishis 4:10). [Rashi cites] the Sages' explanation, "'Your brother's bloods (plural)' – his blood and the blood of his descendants [who will never be born]." So, too, here you can say that only a few people died. Among the Jews there were several completely evil people, who did not deserve the redemption, and they died in the three days of darkness. However, had they remained alive, they could have been the ancestors of millions of people through the generations. This is what the opinions in the midrash are arguing about: whether these descendants would have numbered four times 600,000, or forty-nine times 600,000, or 500 times 600,000. (It's possible that the debate is how to do the math: from the Exodus until the building of the Temple, or until the end of all the generations, or until some other time.) There is a clear proof for our thesis from Rashi's explanation of why they died in the three days of darkness and not another time. [Rashi, following the end of the Mechilta, suggests] that Hashem did not want the Egyptians to notice that any Jews died; so they died and were buried during the darkness, and the Egyptians did not notice they were missing. If we take the midrash literally, that most of the Jews died at that time, it would certainly be inconceivable for the Egyptians not to notice such a tremendous loss! Rather, it is clearly as we have explained.

In other words, Rav Schwab defuses the explosive numbers of the *Medrash* by applying them to future generations. This perspective highlights our obligation to pass on our legacy to future generations... Many times, we feel insignificant. We feel small, like the task in front of us is beyond us. But each of us can have an enormous effect on our world, and the future.

As the **Mesillas Yesharim** in Perek 19 writes:

אם יאמר אדם מי אני ומה אני ספון שאתפלל על הגלות ועל ירושלים וכו', המפני תפלתי יכנסו הגליות ותצמח הישועה ?
תשובתו בצדו, כאותה ששנינו (סנהדרין ל"ח): לפיכך נברא אדם יחידי כדי שכל אחד יאמר בשבילי נברא העולם. . . הרי כאן שחייבים אנחנו
בוזה, ואין לנו ליפטר מפני מיעוט כחנו, כי על כיוצא בזה שנינו (אבות פ"ג): לא עליך המלאכה לגמור ואי אתה בן חורין ליבטל הימנה .
*If one will say: "who am I, and what importance am I that I should pray on the exile and Jerusalem? Will the exiles
be ingathered and the salvation sprout because of my prayers?!"*

*The answer to him is near [his question], as we learned: "Thus man was created alone, so that each person should
say: 'for my sake the world was created' " (Sanhedrin 37a). . .*

*Thus we learn from here that we are obligated in this matter, and cannot exempt ourselves due to our lack of
power. For on all such matters, we learned: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the task, but neither are you
free to abstain from it" (Avot 2:16)*

From Adam, one man, came all of humanity...the far-reaching effects of one person is beyond what you can even
imagine—the progeny that can come, the snowball effect of good deeds...

And as the **Rambam** continues in that paragraph in *Hilchos Teshuva* 3:4 about spiritually waking up...

רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ג הלכה ד
...לפיכך צריך כל אדם שיראה עצמו כל השנה כולה כאילו חציו זכאי וחציו חייב, וכן כל העולם חציו זכאי וחציו חייב, חטא חטא אחד הרי
הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם כולו לכף חובה וגרם לו השחיתה, עשה מצוה אחת הרי הכריע את עצמו ואת כל העולם כולו לכף זכות וגרם
לו ולהם תשועה והצלה שנאמר וצדיק יסוד עולם זה שצדק הכריע את כל העולם לזכות והצילו,

*It is, therefore, necessary for every man to behold himself throughout the whole year in a light of being evenly
balanced between innocence and guilt, and look upon the entire world as if evenly balanced between innocence
and guilt; thus, if he commit one sin, he will overbalance himself and the whole world to the side of guilt, and be a
cause of its destruction; but if he perform one duty, behold, he will overbalance himself and the whole world to the
side of virtue, and bring about his own and their salvation and escape, even as it is said: "But the righteous is an
everlasting foundation" (Prov. 10. 25), it is he, by whose righteousness he overbalanced the whole world to virtue
and saved it.*

The effect one person can have on the world...is enormous!

But there is one more lesson...shown in the connection between the roundabout way God led them out of
Mitzrayim and the fact that some were left behind...the negative impact one can have on others...

שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יג פסוק יח: (יח) וַיֵּסֶב אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָעָם בְּרֶדֶף הַמִּדְבָּר יַם־סוּף וַחֲמִשִּׁים עָלוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
*God led the people roundabout, by way of the wilderness at the Sea of Reeds. Now the Israelites went up
"chamushim" out of the land of Egypt.*

The late **Rav Yehuda Herzl Henkin**, who passed away just a month ago, in his commentary on Chumash, *Chiba
Yeseira* explains the Pasuk to mean that Hashem "took into the desert those who did leave, **because** they were only
a fifth: they were demoralized because the majority of their brethren had stayed behind." Only 20 percent of the
Jews left Egypt!

רש"י שמות פרשת בשלח פרק יג פסוק יז:פן ינחם - יחשבו מחשבה על שיצאו ויתנו לב לשוב:
God was therefore afraid that the majority who did not want to leave would have a negative effect on the morale of
the rest of the Jewish people. **The effect we can have on others—to encourage or to demoralize--is huge.**

But how did Moshe encourage them? אז ישיר is in the future tense. He reminded them to think of their
responsibility to the future...the impact that their current decisions would have on the future. He reminded them
that the singing today---the display of faith today--will affect tomorrow and materialize in a bright future, a royal
Jewish destiny ahead. Our people have lived through a long and bitter *galus*. Because of the pandemic, the last 10
months have been especially difficult and draining... Let us encourage ourselves by remembering that the
resilience and faith we show today will create the future of tomorrow. May we find the strength to continue to
persevere, and may we soon see the day of אז ישיר, the ultimate day of singing with the *Yemos Hamashiach* and
techias hameisim, bimhera viyamenu...amen.