

Good Shabbos, everyone.

Mazel Tov to Chanie and Boruch Bernstein on the *bar mitzva* of their son, Binyamin. Mazel Tov also to Binyamin's grandparents, Rabbi and Mrs. Dovid Bernstein and Rabbi and Mrs. Simcha Kossman, and to his great-grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Louis Penfil. Mazel Tov and welcome to all the family and friends who are here to share in the simcha!

Thank you to this week's Shabbos *drasha* sponsors,

- Mark and Elsa Lustman, "in memory of Mark's grandparents, Joseph Lustman and Rasha Leah Lustman, 7 Shevat, in honor of Rabbi Marwick and Kenny Friedman; and as a *zechus* for a *refuah shelaima* for Rabbi Reuven Bulka."

Thank you for your support of the shul. May the *neshamos* have an *aliyah* and may Hashem reward you for your generosity with good health, happiness, *bracha*, and *hatzlacha*.

This week, we begin the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim, one of the most important and impactful events in Jewish history, when the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt by Hakadosh Baruch with an open display of miracles, and became a nation. So, it is quite puzzling that, just as the Torah is about to describe the ten makkos, the dramatic beginnings of the process, it digresses to provide a lesson in genealogy. When the suspense is greatest, and the story about to reach its climax, the Torah seemingly wanders off script and recounts Moshe's lineage. But even more curious is that the Torah describes the larger family tree. We are given a full, and very detailed, account of his entire family.

שמות פרק ו (יג) וידבר יקנוק אל-משה ואל-אהרן ויצום אל-בני ישראל ואל-פרעה מלך מצרים להוציא את-בני-ישראל מארץ מצרים: (יד) אלה ראשי בית-אבתם בני ראובן בן ישראל חגור ופלוא חגור וקרמי אלה משפחת ראובן: (טו) ובני שמעון ימואל וימין ואהל ויכין וצחר ושאול בן-הפנעניא אלה משפחת שמעון: (טז) ואלה שמות בני-לוי לתלדתם גרשון וקהת ומרגי ושני בני לוי שבע ושלישים ומאת שנה: (יז) בני גרשון לבני ושמעי משפחתם: (יח) ובני קהת עמרם ויצהר וזכרון ועזיאל ושני בני קהת שלש ושלישים ומאת שנה: (יט) ובני מרגי מחלי ומושי אלה משפחת הלוי לתלדתם: (כ) ויקח עמרם את-יוכבד דדתו לו לאשה ותלד לו את-אהרן ואת-משה ושני בני עמרם שבע ושלישים ומאת שנה:

Why is it suddenly so important for us to learn about Moshe's great grandfather, grandfather, father, mother, brother, uncles and cousins?

I believe there are **two** reasons the Torah is telling us about his lineage at this crucial moment in the story. The first reason has to do with Moshe's role in Jewish tradition. He was much more than a prophet or teacher. Moshe's very success, by the life choices he made, is intended to inspire us.

As the **Rambam** writes in *Hilchos Teshuva* (5:2): רמב"ם הלכות תשובה פרק ה הלכה ב:

אל יעבור במחשבתך דבר זה שאומרים טפשי אומה"ע ורוב גולמי בני ישראל שהקב"ה גוזר על האדם מתחלת ברייתו להיות צדיק או רשע, אין הדבר כן אלא כל אדם ראוי לו להיות צדיק כמשה רבינו או רשע כירבעם

A very loose translation: "Our lives are not predetermined. We have free will. Every person can become a Tzaddik like Moshe Rabbeinu."

Despite our best efforts, you and I cannot hope to become a prophet like Moshe. That was a gift from Hashem to Moshe alone. But we are all given challenges by Hashem, uniquely suited for each of us. We are also given the tools and fortitude to respond to these challenges, so that we can become as righteous as Moshe.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch suggests that this is why the Torah finds it necessary to digress from the dramatic story of Moshe and the redemption from Egypt. If we are to view Moshe as an inspiration in our lives, we need to establish that he started as a regular human being, just like you and me. He had two parents siblings, and cousins. He was mortal. Although he would ascend to great heights, he wasn't born with a proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. Like you and me, he had to find his way. He, too, had to grapple with the human challenges of life, both in thought and in action.

פירוש ר' שמשון רפאָרל הירש: מעתה נודעה חשיבות יתירה לעריכת רשימה מדויקת של ייחוסם וקירבתם, כדי להעיד בזאת לכל הדורות, כי רגיל ואנושי הוא מקור מחצבתם, ורגיל ואנושי הוא טבע ברייתם. גם בתקופה העתיקה קרה שאנשים, שהצטיינו כמיטיבי עמם, ניטלה מהם אחרי מותם דמותם האנושית, ובגלל עלילות פאר "אלוהיות" זכו למוצא "אלוהי". הלא ידוע לנו על יהודי אחד מדור מאוחר יותר, שתעודת ייחוסו לא נמצאה בידו, והואיל ולא נמצאה, ויען כי הביא להם לבני האדם מעט ניצוצות - אור, שאך שאלם ממש האיש, הפך בעיני הגויים לברוא - אלוהים, ופשע היה להטיל ספק באלוהותו. משה שלנו היה אדם, נשאר אדם, ולעולם לא יהיה כי אם אדם. . . כי עדות - הייחוס, עם שקבעה כעובדה את טיבם האנושי של משה ואהרן, עלולה היתה להצמיח אמונה, כי כל אדם, ללא יוצא מן הכלל, יכשר להיות נביא.

Now, it is of critical importance to present an exact list of their lineage and relations, so as to attest thereby for all time to come that their origin was ordinary and human, and that the nature of their being was ordinary and human. Right from the earliest times it has happened that men who were outstanding benefactors to their people were, after their death, divested of their human image, and because of their "godlike" feats, were invested with a Divine origin. . .

Our Moshe was human, remained human, and will never be anything but human...

His lineage is testimony of the humanity of Moshe and Aharon, intended to implant the belief that anyone, without exception can achieve exalted levels of prophecy...

Unlike some other religions, the Jewish hero and role model is human. He, too, was born of parents. He, too, had free choice. He, too, made mistakes. He, too, wondered a lot about G-d's world and even asked the question, "Why does suffering happen to good people?" We know his origins, his mission, and his challenges. Therefore, in his life's journey, we can try to see ourselves and our life's journey.

Sometimes, when people write biographies about great Jews, they try to gloss over the challenges. However well-intended it may be, it is, ultimately, damaging. In a famous letter, **Rav Yitzchak Hutner**, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Chaim Berlin, protests against the mistaken impression that our *gedolim* "came out from under the hand of their Creator, in all their fullness and glory." Such a portrayal not only diminishes the stature of the *gadol* in question by downplaying the extent of his efforts and struggles, but it also deprives his life of much of its instructive value. As Rav Hutner writes, "When we speak of a *gadol*, we speak of the finished product. But who knows how much struggle went into achieving that state, or how many challenges there were along the path? And when we fail to recognize this fact, and compare ourselves to the stories we read of the perfection of our *gedolim*, we come to despair..."

The Chofetz Chayim ascended to almost mystical, legendary status by the time he was in his 80s and 90s. Most people know him as a *tzaddik* and a great scholar. But Rav Hutner writes that outsiders knew his life only from when he was a grown man. So, they think that he was born that way. They forget that the Chofetz Chayim was orphaned when he was only ten years old and had to overcome severe challenges and hardships, in order to become a great *gaon* and *tzadik*. Most people don't talk about those challenges. But it was in those moments, when he looked the challenges in the face and pushed ahead, that he became the great Chofetz Chayim. Only by overcoming those challenges was he destined to lead his people during challenging times and to author so many classic works, which are found in every Torah home.

The Torah does not pretend that our leaders were born perfect. The Torah does not gloss over their imperfections. The Torah's lesson is clear. Nobody is born perfect. Nobody has the perfect life. Nobody is expected to be perfect. Everyone faces challenges. The difference between a *tzadik* and a *rasha* is how one responds to those challenges, obstacles, and failings. I think it is not an accident that from Moshe Rabbeinu, to Dovid Hamelech, to Reish Lakish and Rabbi Akiva, our greatest leaders and role models have not had the easiest lives. They were all human beings who went through childhood and adolescence, struggled and faced challenges, and made mistakes. But they modeled for us how to build on our life challenges, and use those experiences as the building blocks to create a strong and bright future. The Torah stresses that Moshe was human, before he engages in what seem like superhuman feats—to inspire us all.

But there is a second important reason the Torah communicates Moshe Rabbeinu's lineage at this time. It is because his illustrious lineage provided him with the strength of character, life lessons, and family legacy that he built upon in his own life. He continued the illustrious tradition which had been handed down to him.

The **Abarbanel** wonders: How did Moshe Rabbeinu, who grew up in Paraoh's palace, identify so strongly with the downtrodden Jewish people... ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם...

אברבנאל פרשת שמות

השאלה הג' אם מרע"ה גדלו בת מלך בבית המלכות והיה לה לבן איך נאמר ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם כי מאין היה יודע משה שהיהודים האמללים היו אחיו ואיך יצא מבית המלך להתחבר עם העבריים העסוקים בעבודת פרך שכל אחד מהם אם יוכל יתרחק מחברתם לבל יראה ברעתם כ"ש האיש משה שלא היה מהם ולא מהמונם:

He answers that it was from his mother and his family circle...with whom he interacted as a child.

אברבנאל פרשת שמות

אמר ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם לפי שמשה תמיד דבקה נפשו ביוכבד אשר גדלתו ובבניה ואחרי שנתגדל ידע מהם אמת ענינו ושהוא מילדי העברים עם היות שבת פרעה גדלתו כבן ולכן היה יוצא אל אחיו העברים שהיו חוץ לעיר בבניני המלך ומשה יצא מארמון המלכות וילך אל אחיו העברים או אל אחיו הלויים או היו אחיו מממש מקרובי עמרם ויוכבד כי העברים בכלל נקראים אחים שנאמר ולאחיד לא תשיך. לא יגוש את רעהו ואת אחיו.

But why does the Torah provide the names of all the extended *yichus*?

Because while Moshe Rabbeinu made his own life choices, he received inspiration and values and character from all the great people who came before him. It was in his spiritual DNA, in the stories his mother told him as she nursed him, in the family legends he heard about in his childhood.

Moshe came from a long line of *baalei chessed*...beginning with his great-grandfather Levi himself. They were people who cared about others and stood up for others. The **Medrash Rabba** teaches us at the beginning of Shemos, when the *shevatim* are named—their names reflect lessons related to *geula*. Levi—a name rooted in the word “attached”—represents the *midda* of empathy...connecting to the plight of others.

שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשת שמות פרשה א סימן ה

ה ואלה שמות בני ישראל, על שם גאולת ישראל נזכרו כאן, ראובן, שנאמר (שמות ג) ראה ראיתי את עני עמי, שמעון, ע"ש וישמע אלהים את נאקתם, לוי, ע"ש שנתחבר הקדוש ב"ה לצרתם מתוך הסנה, לקיים מה שנאמר (תהלים צא) עמו אנכי בצרה.

This *midda* was evident in his care and concern for his sister, Dina. Although the attack on Shechem was incorrectly carried out in rage, it was coming from a place of care and concern...הכזונה יעשה את אחותינו—putting the plight of others above his own safety and security.

Also, chief among his inspiring ancestors were his direct ancestors—who taught him about empathy. He was the son of Amram, son of Kehas, son of Levi;

(טז) ואלה שמות בני ישראל ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם... ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם (שם, יד - טז). קשה, למה אמר תיבת 'שמות' :

The **Shel"ha Hakadosh** writes that Levi knew with *ruach hakodesh* that his descendants—unlike the rest of the Jewish people--would not be enslaved and he wanted them to stay connected and join with the rest of the Jewish people in their suffering. He, therefore, gave them names to reflect this wish that they always be , נושא בעול עם חבירו, act with empathy towards their fellow Jew. The name, Gershon means “strangers in a strange land.” The name Kehas, means their teeth were blunted. The name Merari refers to the bitterness that affected the Jewish people...

של"ה פרשת וארא דרך חיים תוכחת מוסר

יט. 'אלה ראשי בית אבתם בני ראובן וגו', 'ובני שמעון וגו', 'ואלה שמות בני לוי' (שם, יד - טז). קשה, למה אמר תיבת 'שמות' אצל לוי יותר ממה שאמר בראובן ושמעון. הענין הוא, כי שבט לוי לא היו בגלות. ולוי ידע דבר זה, ורצה להשתתף בצרת הצבור. מה עשה, קרא שמות לבניו על שם הגלות, דהיינו שם 'גרשון' על שם כי גרים הם בארץ לא להם, ושם 'קהת' על שם שיניהם קהות, ושם 'מררי' על שם 'וימררו את חייהם' (שם א, יד). זהו שאמר 'ואלה שמות בני לוי'. ומכאן ילמוד האדם להשתתף בצער הצבור אף על פי שאין הצרה מגעת לו. וכן הודיע השם יתברך למשה רבינו ע"ה (שם ג, יד) 'אהיה אשר אהיה', אהיה עמהם בגלות זה אהיה עמהם בגלות אחרת (ברכות ט ב).

And this *midda* was evident in *shevet Levi* in the way they acted during the *sh'ibud*. **Rav Yehonasan Eibschutz** writes that Paraoh freed *shevet Levi* from slavery so that they would not identify with the suffering of the rest of the Jews. He saw through astrology that the savior would come from that *shevet* and

thought that by keeping them sheltered from the suffering he could keep them from caring, and getting involved.

תפארת יהונתן על פ' וארא

אלה ראשי בית אבותם בני ראובן בכור ישראל הנה נראה הטעם שלא שעבדו מצרים בשבט לוי היה כי פרעה ראה בקסם כי משבט לוי יקום המושיע ופרעה חשב מי שאינו בצרה אינו יכול להושיע כי נוצר תאנה יאכל פריה מי שסבל גלות יהיה אח"כ לראש ולכך לא שעבד בשבט לוי כלל ולא יוצד קלהקים משבט לוי מושיע וזהו היה טענת ישראל ג"כ ולא שמעו אל משה מקוצר רוח ועבודה קשה יטהם בעבודה רבה ושבט לוי חפשי מכל ואיך יתכן שהוא יתנשא ויבחר ה' בו למושיע

But *shevet* Levi took the message of their grandfather to heart and attached themselves to, and cared deeply about, the rest of Klal Yisrael who was suffering. They left the comfort of Goshen and helped their brothers and sisters in their plight, something Moshe would do as well. That is the essence of a Jew . רחמנים ביישנים . And that is what the Medrash teaches us about Moshe Rabbeinu. He left Paroh's palace and immediately got involved in helping his brothers and sisters...a choice he made, but a lesson he had learned from his illustrious and caring ancestors.

שמות רבה (וילנא) פרשת שמות פרשה א סימן כז

...וירא בסבלותם, מהו וירא שהיה רואה בסבלותם ובוכה ואומר חבל לי עליכם מי יתן מותי עליכם, שאין לך מלאכה קשה ממלאכת הטיט, והיה נותן כתיפיו ומסייע לכל אחד ואחד מהן. . . אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אתה הנחת עסקיך והלכת לראות בצערן של ישראל ונהגת בהן מנהג אחים, אני מניח את העליונים ואת התחתונים ואדבר עמך, הה"ד וירא ה' כי סר לראות,

At the end of the day, the most important character trait is caring for others. The *midda* was evident in Moshe Rabbeinu and the Medrash teaches us that it made him stand out and become chosen as the savior.

שמות רבה פרשה א סימן כז: ראה הקדוש ברוך הוא במשה שסר מעסקיו לראות בסבלותם, לפיכך ויקרא אליו אלהים מתוך הסנה. This character trait has been found in great leaders of the Jewish people throughout the ages. I have shared with you before, the personal account related by the great Maggid of Bnei Brak, **Rav Yaakov Galinsky**, of time he spent in Vilna as a young yeshiva bochur, when it was still free from Nazi rule during World War II. Many Yeshiva bachurim had taken refuge there. People were waiting in long lines to greet the *gadol hador*, **Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky**. As a proud Yeshiva bachur, Rav Galinsky also made an appointment for the following day and spent the night nervously reviewing Maseches Yevamos, assuming Rav Chaim Ozer would test him on his Talmud studies. What else does the *gadol hador* do when meeting an eager yeshiva student?

When Rav Galinsky's turn came, he was sure he knew the first three questions Rav Chaim Ozer would ask. The first question would be: What are you learning? Second: What *chiddushim* do you have? And third: What else have you been *mechadesh*?

But instead, reflecting conditions in those war-torn days, Rav Chaim Ozer asked the young refugee whom he had never met before the following three questions:

1. When was the last time you saw your parents? Young students had left their parents in search of safety...
2. Do you have a blanket? Beds were out of the question, but without a blanket people could freeze to death.
3. May I see the condition of your shoes? People's shoes were often filled with holes. Indeed, when Rav Chaim Ozer saw that Rav Galinsky's shoes had so many holes, he immediately gave him money for new shoes...

Those were the three questions he asked. Not in learning...but in *chessed*... caring for a Jew he had never seen before.

Rav Galinsky writes that on that day he learned the true nature of a *gadol b'Yisrael* and the true essence of our Torah—deep care and concern for every Jew...the *midda* of *chessed*...the *midda* of עם חבירו, empathy, a *midda* we learn from the greatest Jew to ever live...Moshe Rabbeinu. May we all emulate Moshe Rabbenu's empathy, compassion, and kindness, especially at this *eis tzara*, when so many are in need of help and compassion. May we all be *zoche* to the ultimate *geulas bimhera viyamenu*...amen.