

Parashat Shemot 5780, 2020:

Moshe's Transformation

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Moshe ben Itta Golda, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, Reuven Shmuel ben Leah and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman *zatzal* (1874–1941) was one of the greatest disciples of the saintly Chafetz Chaim *zatzal* (Rav Yisrael Meir Kagan, 1838-1933). In his *hesped* for his beloved rebbe, he noted that the Chafetz Chaim had at first wanted to change the world, then he lowered his expectations to his community, then to his family, and finally settled upon changing himself. According to Rav Wasserman, the Chafetz Chaim was so humble he failed to realize that this self-transformation ultimately did change his family, community and the entire world.

Our *parasha* contains a similar narrative of change in the person of *Moshe Rabbeinu* (our teacher Moshe). As the Torah attests, Moshe's youth was spent as the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter. As such, he was raised amidst palatial opulence and received all the benefits befitting a prince. As Rashi (1040-1105) notes in his comment on *Sefer Shemot* 2:11, Pharaoh went so far as to designate Moshe the head of his household. Most people in this situation would have basked in the glow of luxurious living and repudiated their enslaved people and family of origin. Moshe, however, even at this early stage of development, acted quite differently than one might naturally have expected.

The Torah is completely silent regarding the inner workings of Moshe's mind and his actions as head of Pharaoh's household. Nonetheless, we can deduce that he maintained a connection to his Jewish faith, identity, and people:

Now it came to pass in those days that Moses grew up and went out to his brothers and looked at their burdens, and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers. He turned this way and that way, and he saw that there was no man; so he struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (*Sefer Shemot 2:11-12*, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

Why did Moshe run to the rescue of his fellow Jew? After all, like any nobleman of his day, he could easily have ignored this all-to-common violence. Moreover, the next day, he went out of the palace once again to look after the welfare of his fellow Jews. Finding Datan and Aviram (Rashi 2:13) amid a heated argument that bordered on physical violence, Moshe immediately asked them to refrain from striking one another. Unfortunately, they saw him as an interloper and rejected his intervention, and their harsh rebuke revealed to Moshe that his actions against the Egyptian taskmaster the day before had become public knowledge:

He [Moshe] went out on the second day, and behold, two Hebrew men were quarreling, and he said to the wicked one, "Why are you going to strike your friend?" And he retorted, "Who made you a man, a prince, and a judge over us? Do you plan to slay me as you have slain the Egyptian?" Moses became frightened and said, "Indeed, the matter has become known!" (2:13-14)

Now that Moshe realized "the matter has become known!" he had little choice but to run away from Egypt and seek asylum in Midian. This was a very wise choice, since when "Pharaoh heard of this incident he sought to slay Moses." (2:15) In sum, Moshe had risked everything in his identification with, and defense of, his brethren.

After Moshe fled Pharaoh, we find his focus on justice and righteousness had expanded to include the needs of non-Jews:

... so Moses fled from before Pharaoh. He stayed in the land of Midian, and he sat down by a well. Now the chief of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and drew [water], and they filled the troughs to water their father's flocks. But the shepherds came and drove them away; so Moses arose and rescued them and watered their flocks. (2:15-16)

Herein we see that Moshe completed several crucial steps in becoming a consummate leader. At first, he changed himself and refused to be corrupted by the life of a palace prince. Next, he grew in his love of his fellow Jews. Now, in a true test of his moral rectitude, he demonstrated his desire for universal justice and fought to protect the non-Jewish daughters of the chief of Midian. With righteousness, conviction of purpose, and singular bravery, Moshe became a true representative of the Master of the Universe.

With Hashem's help, may we strive to emulate *Moshe Rabbeinu* as we seek to bring about positive changes in ourselves, our nation, and ultimately, our world. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

Past *drashot* may be found at my blog-website: <http://reparashathashavuah.org>
They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org> using the search criteria Etengoff and the *parasha's* name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

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*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.