



Shemos 5775

January 9, 2015

A Taste of Torah Sweat the Small Stuff

By Rabbi Akiva Stern

Picture a stark operating room. On the surgery bed beneath the glaring lights lies a frightened young boy. In a ring surrounding him stands a grim group of surgeons and nurses wearing identical surgical gowns and masks, preparing to perform a delicate procedure. The mood is intense and serious as the team is all-too-aware of the seriousness of the situation. The child's life hangs by a thread, and everything depends on the outcome of the surgery. Now look a bit closer, notice that one of the doctors is acting differently from the others. Notice him gently, lovingly hold the young boy's hand. Watch him stroke the brow of the child as he soothes his fears. It is clear that this man is not merely a surgeon, but the father of the child as well.

In this week's Torah portion we are told of two heroines: the midwives Shifra and Puah, who had been ordered by Pharaoh to perform a horrifying job. Pharaoh commanded them to kill each and every Jewish male child as he emerged into the world! Rather than do this terrible task, they bravely risked their own lives. First, they helped each mother give birth safely to their children, male or not; then they reported to Pharaoh that by the time they had arrived, the children had already been born.

Rashi relates the Gemara in Sotah (11b), which teaches us that Shifra and Puah were in fact really Yocheved and Miriam, respectively, mother of and sister to Moshe, the future leader of the Jewish nation. These noms de guerre they were given hint to how they performed their midwife duties. Shifra is derived from the word "to beautify" and tells us that Yocheved would clean and beautify the newborns. The name Puah hints to the cooing sounds Miriam would use to calm and settle the crying of

the newborns.

The Torah's use of these pseudonyms in place of their more famous, illustrious names seems strange. What does the Torah hope to teach us by focusing on how these holy women coddled the newborns?!

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1945-2001) answers that when Yocheved and Miriam risked their lives to save the male offspring, it would have been quite sufficient had they left immediately after the successful birth. There was no need for them to further risk their lives by remaining longer at the scene of the crime. Yet, because of their great love for every Jew, these great women took the time to lovingly pamper and soothe the boys they had delivered. Much like the father of the boy in the operating room who was not satisfied to merely save his child's life, but also felt the need and recognized the importance of soothing the fear of the young boy.

The Torah is teaching us a great lesson, one embodied by the acts of the women so aptly called Shifra and Puah. Often, when we are tasked with accomplishing great deeds, we tend to hyper-focus on the important outcome and forget the small details. Maybe in our rush to do such good we inadvertently trample the innocent bystander. But true greatness and leadership can be identified when we note the completion of even the smallest of details. Yocheved and Miriam not only saved the Jewish People; they did so down to the finest detail, because of their great love for every Jew.

May we all strive to emulate these great women, to see the needs of the small child or the destitute beggar. Let us not become so focused on large, great actions that we forget everything else!

Stories For The Soul

Better to Go Hungry

Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer, formerly Rav of Cong. Zera Avraham of Denver and currently a prominent Rav in Baltimore, attended a meeting of a number of charity organizations in Baltimore. The meeting was hosted in the home of a member of the community. The committee was discussing the best way to distribute funds and who should receive the money.

The host had placed refreshments on the tables, but Rabbi Hopfer had not partaken of any of the food or drink. Despite several offers from the host to eat or drink something, Rabbi Hopfer kept declining. The host started to wonder why the rabbi was not eating his food.

Rabbi Hopfer explained his actions. "We are here discussing so many sad stories, so many people who need our help financially and otherwise. I feel that if I refrain from eating, and I experience a bit of hunger and discomfort, I'll be better equipped to make decisions concerning these poverty-stricken individuals."

Rashi tells us that although Moshe was a prince in the house of Pharaoh, when he saw the sufferings of his Jewish brethren, he suffered along with them. We, too, must not ignore the plight of others, even though we ourselves may not directly be affected by their problems.

THE FAR SIDE OF THE TALMUD

Aggada, the passages of the Talmud that focuses on Jewish thought and outlook, provides keen insights into human nature, and offers advice on how to live our lives, can be difficult to understand, but the knowledge and wisdom hiding beneath the surface is ample reason to make the effort. Be fascinated and inspired as Rabbi Moshe Heyman presents a whole new dimension in Torah learning based on the classic work *Ain Yaakov*. Tuesdays, 1:45-2:45 pm at the Kollel Torah Center, 9550 Belleview Ave. For more info, contact rmh@denverkollel.org.

THE M.B. GLASSMAN FOUNDATION GOLD LUNCH & LEARN PROGRAM

The M.B. Glassman Foundation GOLD Program is a division of the Denver Community Kollel dedicated to bringing Torah study to seniors in the community. Don't miss a great Lunch and Learn class on the weekly parsha at the East Side Kosher Deli, 499 S. Elm St. at 11:30 am. There is no charge for the lunch or the learning! Transportation can be arranged. For more information, contact rmf@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

WOMEN'S WELLNESS WORKSHOP ON TUES., JANUARY 13TH

Don't miss the Kollel's 3rd Annual Women's Wellness Workshop at Cableland, 4150 Shangri-La Drive (at Leetsdale Dr. and Cedar Ave.), on January 13th at 5:00 pm. Discover how to achieve optimum health in mind, body and soul. As always, there will be great food and camaraderie. Cost is \$54; reserve by Jan. 9th and receive a free copy of Dr. David Lieberman's book *Seek Peace and Pursue It*.

To reserve, visit www.denverkollel.org, email info@denverkollel.org or call 303-820-2855.

By: Rabbi Yaakov Zions

Last week we asked:

Q: Besides the *haftaros* of Rosh Chodesh, the day before Rosh Chodesh and a fast day, which *haftaros* are generally recited more than once during the course of the year?

A: 1) The *haftarah* of Parshas Beha'aloscha is the same as that of Shabbos Chanukah.

2) The *haftarah* of the second day of Sukkos contains most of the *haftarah* for

Parshas Pekudei. 3) Sefardim read the *haftarah* of the first Shabbos following the Fast of the Seventeenth of Tammuz (the first Shabbos of the period known as the Three Weeks that begins with the Seventeenth of Tammuz and culminates with Tisha B'Av) on Parshas Shemos, as well.

This week's question: Which *haftaros* are sometimes repeated twice in one year?

Ask the Rabbi

Mayim Achronim Water

Ron Shama wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

What is the source for "*mayim achronim*"? Some people say that it's halacha, but I've been to people where they don't do it. And are women supposed to? Thanks

Dear Ron,

The Shulchan Aruch states that "*mayim achronim chova*", i.e., washing one's hands before *birchas hamazon* is an obligation. Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg zatzal, told me that women are included in this obligation to the same degree as men.

There are two reasons which are offered:

Just as a soiled Kohen is invalid to perform the Temple Service in the Beis Hamikdash, so too soiled hands make a person unfit to say a blessing.

To clean off any "*melach sedomis*" - "salt of Sodom" - which might be on the hands. *Melach sedomis* was a strong salt harmful to the eyes.

Some people have the custom to not wash *mayim achronim*. Since *melach*

sedomis is virtually non-existent today, and the concept of "cleanliness" is a relative matter and most people don't consider their hands "dirty" after a meal, washing them would not be necessary.

I once heard a beautiful explanation of the symbolism of *mayim achronim*: *Mayim achronim* washes off the "salt of Sodom". The people of Sodom were infamous for their stingy cold-heartedness, especially regarding hospitality towards strangers. For example, the people of Sodom surrounded Lot's house and ordered him to send out the wayfarers he was hosting. After a meal, having eaten our fill, we might not empathize with a poor stranger knocking on our door asking for a little food. This quality of cold-heartedness is the antithesis of Judaism, and therefore we "wash it off" - saying, "We want no part of it!"

Sources:

-Chulin 105a,b & Tosafot, Berachot 53b and Tosafot.

-Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 181:1, 10; M. B. 22.

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