

A Taste of Torah

Special Delivery

By Rabbi Mordechai E. Fleisher

Midwifery wasn't supposed to be a dangerous profession.

But then again, these weren't normal times. Pharaoh, in a panic that the savior of the Jewish People would soon be born, orders the Jewish midwives, Shifra and Puah, to kill every male child born to the Jewish women. Shifra and Puah knew good and well that to disobey Pharaoh could mean death. But, says the Torah, they were G-d-fearing women. And G-d forbids killing babies, even on pain of death. So, they hemmed and hawed to Pharaoh, while the babies kept on coming.

Who were these two heroic women? Rashi (1:15) tells us that Shifra was none other than Yocheved, Moshe's mother, and Puah was Miriam, Moshe's sister. Why the name change, you ask? Rashi further explains that the name Shifra connotes that she beautified and pampered (no, not those pampers) the baby, while Puah was so called because she would make cooing noises (think poo-poo-poo) to calm the infant.

Wonderful names, but, if it were me, I'd prefer a name that personified selflessness in saving those babies from death, rather than one that told of my babysitting abilities. Yet the Torah saw fit to identify these women with names that bespoke their baby-care talents. Why?

Rabbi Shimshon Pincus (1944-2001), in his work *Tiferes Torah*, explains that the greatness of Yocheved and Miriam – a.k.a. Shifra and Puah – did not lie merely in their willingness to sacrifice their lives to fulfill G-d's Will. Certainly, G-d's Word motivated them to risk their lives. But the primary focus of their lives was to be “mothers” of the Jewish Nation. They didn't merely deliver

the babies; they looked after their well-being to the nth degree, even to the point of beautifying and calming the children, as a mother would do for her child.

However, if we were to merely examine their heroic refusal of Pharaoh, we wouldn't necessarily conclude that their lifelong devotion was to be a “mother” to all the Jewish babies. One could argue that they simply realized it was improper to save their lives through taking another. However, when we discover that even after illegally delivering the babies alive, they cared for them, pampered them, cooed to them, going to great lengths to take care of their most insignificant needs, we realize that these women had a much greater mission in mind. Hence, the names they were given, Shifra and Puah, are indeed quite apropos, for they tell us of the lifelong desire of this great mother-daughter team to care for all the Jewish babies as a mother would.

The Torah tells us that as reward for their efforts, Hashem gave them “houses”. What is the nature of these houses? Rashi (1:21) explains that Yocheved was the matriarch of the House of the Priesthood; she had a son Aharon, from whom would descend Kohanim; she also merited to have a major part of the House of the Levites descend from her, through her son Moshe. Miriam would merit to be the progenitor of the House of David, as David, King of Israel, descended from her.

Rabbi Pincus explains that these “houses” were a fitting reward for Yocheved and Miriam. Since, as was explained, their sole desire was to be a “mother” to the Jewish people, Hashem responded in kind, and they became the founders of two of the most prestigious dynasties in Jewish history.

Stories For The Soul

The Broken Knob

When I was a boy, a knob broke off an appliance, leaving just a metal stub sticking out with no knob to turn it. My father was very handy and had cabinets filled with nuts, bolts, and widgets. He found a knob and used it in place of the broken one.

I remember being amazed because the replacement knob didn't look anything like the original. I asked my father how a different knob could work. He showed me that although the outside of the knob was different, if you looked inside, you could see that the inner space that fit over the metal stub was exactly the same.

This memory stuck with me. As I grew older, I realized it is the same with people. We may look and act different on the outside, but on the inside, we are all the same. We all have hopes, emotions and desires. They may vary, but they need to be validated and honored in the way that best suits the individual.

Moshe worked as a shepherd for Yisro when one day, a sheep ran away from the flock. Moshe found it drinking water from a brook. Instead of beating the sheep, Moshe said, “If you are thirsty, you are probably also tired,” so Moshe lifted the sheep and carried it back to the flock.

Moshe realized that this little sheep needed to be treated with love and understanding. Hashem said, “If this is how he leads and cares for his own flock, I want him to lead and care for My flock – the children of Israel.”

Adapted with permission from Shul-Week by Rabbi Boruch Lederman.

Kollel Happenings

THE STORY OF THE EXODUS WITH RABBI SHACHNE SOMMERS

Join Rabbi Shachne Sommers for a three-week series delving into the story of the Exodus of the Jewish people from Egypt. For information, contact Rabbi Moshe Heyman at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855



WEST SIDE NIGHT SEDER AT THE KOLLEL

Join the West Side community for vibrant Torah learning at the Kollel. Sunday- Thursday, except Wednesday, learning from 8-9 p.m., followed by Ma'ariv. For chavrusas or other information, contact Rabbi Mordechai Fleisher at rmf@denverkollel.org or 303-820-2855.



LIBERATED PARENTS, LIBERATED CHILDREN WITH MRS. AVIGAIL STEINHARTER

Join Mrs. Avigail Steinharter for "Liberated Parents, Liberated Children: Your Guide to a Happier Family." This six part series for moms integrates the timeless wisdom of the Torah with the approach of the world-renowned Dr. Haim Ginott. Classes will be held on Tues., Jan 10, Jan 17, Jan 24, Jan 31, Feb 10, Feb 17 from 11:30 a.m. - 12:30 p.m. at Barnes & Noble, 960 S. Colorado Blvd. Cost: \$80 for all six classes. For information, call 303-820-2855 or email info@denverkollel.org

Interpersonal Issues Returning Lost Objects

Also included in the mitzvah of returning lost objects is an obligation to prevent a needless loss of money. For example, if one sees that a homeowner left the lights on, and he knows that the owner wouldn't want them on, they should be shut off. If closing them isn't feasible, the owner should be contacted.

The above is true only if one would expect the owner to take the trouble of closing the lights. If the owner probably wouldn't care enough to close them, the observer is exempt from taking action.

Adapted with permission from "The Halachos of Other People's Money" by Rabbi Pinchas Bodner (Feldheim Publishers)

Ask the Rabbi On the Tip of Your Tongue

Aviva Jackson wrote:
Dear Rabbi,

My family went to my grandparents' house for lunch on Shabbos, and at the table I gave a d'var Torah. I quoted a couple of verses off by heart, but afterwards my dad said that he heard somewhere that one is not supposed to quote from the Torah by heart. I am embarrassed about this, in case it is true and I've done the wrong thing. Can you tell me if this is true or not, please?

Dear Aviva Jackson,

In a sense, your dad is right, but there's no reason for you to be embarrassed. Here's why:

The Talmud states: "You are not allowed to say Torah verses by heart." However, we find many exceptions to this rule. For example, the Talmud relates that on Yom Kippur the Kohen Gadol used to say the public Torah reading by heart. Other kohanim also had certain verses to say during the Temple service, which they often said by heart. And it's a universal custom that we close our eyes when saying the verse, "Shema Yisrael..."

Obviously, this rule applies only under certain conditions. The commentators offer different explanations for when it applies:

According to many authorities, the prohibition applies only when you are helping other people fulfill a halachic obligation. For example, the public Torah reading cannot be said by heart, because there is an obligation for the listeners to hear the Torah.

According to the Shulchan Aruch, the prohibition doesn't apply to a verse which is well-known. So, for example, you can say by heart any verse from the daily prayers.

Other authorities maintain that there is no actual prohibition against saying verses by heart. Rather, it's preferable and it's a mitzvah to be strict and read the verses from a book.

Maimonides does not even mention the prohibition of reciting verses by heart, indicating that he permits it completely. Some explain this as follows: Just as the Sages in the time of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi lifted the ban against writing down the Oral Torah, so too, they allowed reciting the Written Torah by heart. Both steps were to safeguard the Torah and protect it from oblivion.

Ideally, you should look up the verses. But if that's difficult or a strain on your audience, you can be lenient in light of all the various opinions and leniencies, as is the general custom.

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