

לעילוי נשמת
מרת עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל



עֵלֵי דֶשֶׁה

Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur

Signs for the Ages

וַיַּעַן מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר וְהֵן לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לִי וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ
בְּקוֹלִי, כִּי יֹאמְרוּ לֹא נִרְאָה אֱלֹהֵי ה'

Moshe responded and said, "But they will not believe me and they will not heed my voice, for they will say, 'Hashem did not appear to you.'" (Shemos 4:1)

The Sfas Emes asks: How could Moshe Rabbeinu know for certain that Bnei Yisrael wouldn't believe him?

If a person will grab hold of the snake's tail – holding strong and triumphing over his nisayon – the snake will become a staff for him to hold, supporting him and giving him strength to withstand future nisyonos.

his staff down, and it would become a snake; he would then grab it by its tail, and it would become a staff once more. Second, Moshe would insert his hand into his pocket, and when he removed it, it would have *tzara'as*; when he returned it into his pocket, the *tzara'as* would disappear. Third, Moshe would pour some water of the Nile onto dry land, and it would become blood. The *pasuk* says: וְהָיָה אִם לֹא יֵאֱמִינוּ לָךְ וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ לְקוֹל הָאֵת הָרִאשׁוֹן, וְהֵאֱמִינוּ לְקוֹל הָאֵת הַשֵּׁנִי הָאֲתוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְגו' – *It shall be that if they do not believe you and do not heed the voice of the first sign, they will believe the voice of the latter sign. And it shall be that if they do not believe even these two signs and do not heed your voice...* (4:8-9)

Here, too, the Sfas Emes asks: Hashem surely knew how many signs Bnei Yisrael would need to believe Moshe. Why did Hashem phrase this as if He were unsure?

The Sfas Emes answers that the Jewish people in Mitzrayim didn't need any convincing. As soon as Moshe told them he would redeem them, they believed in him fully, without need for signs. Moshe was concerned, however, about later periods of *galus* (all of which are rooted in *galus Mitzrayim*), when the *emunah*

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וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיִם

And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Mitzrayim. (Shemos 1:1)

The *mefarshim* discuss why the Torah counts Bnei Yisrael at this juncture, especially since they are counted earlier, when the Torah tells of their arrival in Mitzrayim.⁵

In halachah there is a concept known as *bittul*, by which a minority or unimportant item becomes nullified in a greater mass. There are exceptions to this. One exception is when the item in question is referred to by its own name, so it retains its uniqueness. Another is when such an item is sold by quantity; this means it's distinct and important.

When going into *galus*, Bnei Yisrael were made aware that they had distinctive names and identities, and that they were worthy of being counted one by one. They would thus not become *batel* and assimilate into Egyptian culture.⁶

With this we may understand why Bnei Yisrael took care to maintain their names, language and dress while in Mitzrayim.

There is a discussion whether food becomes *batel* based on name or taste.⁷ "Name" is an external classification of food, while "taste" is an internal one. One who seeks to avoid drowning into his surroundings

5 Bereishis 46:8 cont. on page 3

6 See *Likutei HaRim*, Bamidbar s.v. *Se'u es rosh*

7 See Avodah Zarah 66a; Rema, *Shulchan Aruch*, Y.D. 98:2

Shouldn't he have said, "Perhaps they will not believe me"?

Hashem replied to Moshe that He would equip Moshe with three miracles to perform, so that Bnei Yisrael would believe him. First, Moshe would throw

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of Yidden might begin to waver. How could their faith in Moshe's *shelichus* be reinforced? Hashem therefore provided Moshe with three signs, so that even when Yidden would be on a very low level, they could still maintain their *emunah*.

We must understand, however, why three signs were necessary for this purpose; why couldn't one sign suffice? Let us explore the Sfas Emes's words on a deeper level.

The Midrash¹ states that Moshe's three signs correspond to the three Avos. This means that each of the Avos bequeathed to his descendants a special *koach*, which would help them withstand the trials of their spiritual *galus*; and Moshe's three miracles alluded to these three *kochos*.

When Hashem commanded Avraham Avinu, as his last *nisayon*, to slaughter his son Yitzchak, Hashem said: "I beg of you to withstand this *nisayon*. Otherwise, people might say that the earlier *nisyonos* were not substantial."² What does this mean?

Hashem had no doubt that Avraham would carry out whatever he was commanded, regardless of its difficulty. The concern was that if not for the *Akeidah*, a Yid in later generations might think to himself, *Avraham withstood nine nisyonos, but they were not as difficult as what I am presently going through*. Hashem therefore commanded Avraham to *shecht* his son, so that whatever a Yid would face, even in the most extreme situation, he could always draw strength from Avraham.

This strength that Avraham Avinu gifted his descendants was displayed in Moshe's first sign. Moshe's staff became a fearsome snake, symbolic of the most dreadful situation a Yid might find himself in. The lesson was: If a person will grab hold of the snake's tail – holding strong and triumphing over his *nisayon* – the snake will become a staff for him to hold, supporting him and giving him strength to withstand future *nisyonos*.

Moshe's second sign, with his hand becoming afflicted with *tzara'as*, corresponds to Yitzchak Avinu. Before we study this, a question is in place. Why did this miracle require Moshe to place his hand into his pocket? Why not to wave it in the air, or make some other gesture?

What is our job in this world? To reveal the light of Hashem in this *olam hama'aseh*, this world of action. Only in this world can we accomplish; after we move on, we can only reap the fruits of our actions. This responsibility of our *avodah* in *Olam Hazeih* is symbolized by the hand, the limb of activity.

Moshe's hand showing the *tumah* of *tzara'as* represented the depths of sin a person can fall into in this world. But this *tumah* only appeared when Moshe concealed his hand in his pocket, because the impurity of sin can only be a covering over a Yid; the *Yiddishe neshamah* remains always pristine.

How can a Yid rid himself of the impure casing of sin he finds himself in? By tapping into the *koach* of Yitzchak Avinu. Yitzchak was the first to receive his *bris milah* at eight days old. By

internalizing the message of the holy *bris*, a person can rise above his sin and reveal the light of Hashem from within himself, as the pasuk says (Iyov 19:26), וּמִבְּשָׂרִי אֶחֱזֶה, וּמֵאֲלוֹתַי – *and from my flesh I see G-d*.

The third sign, where Moshe poured water on dry land and it turned to blood, signified the *koach* of Yaakov.

Water does not have its own form; it adopts the shape of its container. This is true in the spiritual sense, as well. Water can purify a person from the nethermost *tumah*; yet it can also epitomize *tumah* itself.³

When Moshe poured water on the earth and it turned to blood, this showed that for a person who is entrenched in earthliness, even purity-giving water will become as blood, which symbolizes the desires of this world.

How can a person elevate himself above this lowly stance? With the *koach* of Yaakov Avinu. We recite in a *piyyut*, יח וּבְיַמֵּינוּ יוֹדֵנוּ לֵב וְגַל אֲבֵן מִפִּי בְּאֵר מַיִם – [*Yaakov*] *united his heart and rolled a stone from atop a well of water*. He revealed for his descendants how to expose pristine, purifying water.

Yaakov's crossing over the Yarden⁴ alluded that one must sanctify even the permitted and elevate it to *ruchniyus*. When a Yid follows Yaakov's example and uplifts the mundane, he rises above earthliness, and then the waters he encounters will bring him only to *taharah*.

(בנאות דשא – שמות תשפ"ג)

1 Shemos Rabbah 3:13

2 Rashi, Bereishis 22:2

3 In a similar vein, it is told that the Baal Shem Tov was once walking with his *talmidim*, when they passed a frozen river upon which was carved an idolatrous symbol. The Baal Shem Tov remarked, "Water can purify a person from impurity, yet when it is frozen, it can be engraved with an icon of utter *tumah*."

4 Bereishis 32:11

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must retain his individuality in both the internal aspect and the external. A person's name and dress are exterior definitions of himself, while his language is an interior definition.⁸ By guarding themselves all in these areas, Bnei Yisrael ensured their survival as a distinct nation.



וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מְסֻכּוֹת לְפָרְעָה אֶת פְּתָם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס

They built storage cities for Pharaoh, Pisom and Raamses. (1:11)

Chazal teach that as each building was built in these cities, it would begin to shudder and then would be swallowed into the ground. What was the lesson in this?

As Bnei Yisrael underwent the *kur habarzel*, the refinery that was Mitzrayim,

Those who truly fear Hashem recognize that a house, like everything else in this world, has no worth of its own

they had to learn that nothing in this world is permanent; everything eventually ceases to exist and returns to the earth. With this mindset, essential for an *eved Hashem*, they could proceed to become Hashem's nation.



וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִיִּלְדַת הָעִבְרִית וְגו' בְּיַלְדָּן
אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וְגו' אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהִמָּתֵן אִתּוֹ וְאִם בַּת
הוּא וְחִיָּה

The king of Mitzrayim said to the Jewish midwives... "When you deliver the Jewish

women... if it is a son, you are to kill him, and if it is a daughter, she shall live." (1:15-16)

In Pharaoh's instruction to let the Jewish daughters live, the word וְחִיָּה is used. But this is *lashon zachar*; why doesn't the pasuk say וְחִיָּתָה, in *lashon nekeivah*?

When telling of Shifra and Puah's reward, the pasuk says (1:21), וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים, – [Hashem] made them houses. Here too, *lashon zachar* is employed; why isn't the word לָהֶן used?

The Gemara (Sotah 11b) tells that Pharaoh decreed upon the Jewish women to carry out men's work. This is why he told the midwives הוּא בַת הוּא וְחִיָּה – he wanted the midwives to breath male-like life into the baby girls.

Hearing this, Shifra and Puah determined to transform this wicked command into something positive.

Besides for commanding the midwives to kill the baby boys, Pharaoh also tried seducing them to immorality.⁹ Typically, women are more weak-minded (רעמתן קלות) than men. This applies both to seduction¹⁰ and to intimidation by authority.¹¹ Facing both manners of coercion, Shifra and Puah adopted man-like vigor and refused. In fact, as soon as the words were out of Pharaoh's mouth, their resistance was already formulated. R. Bunim of Peshischa explains that וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם – they did not do as the king of Mitzrayim spoke to them (1:17) means that already as the king of Mitzrayim spoke to them they determined not to heed his words.

From where did Shifra and Puah draw this strength? They drew a *kal v'chomer*: If the Jewish women in Mitzrayim were able to exert masculine strength in the service of a human king, surely they could do so in the service of Hashem!

Their reward was וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים. Since they exhibited man-like strength in resisting their *nisyonos*, Hashem gave them masculine legacies – houses of *kehunah* and *leviyah*, of which the males would serve Hashem in the Beis Hamikdash.



וַיְהִי כִּי יָרְאוּ הַמִּיִּלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים
וַיְהִי כִּי יָרְאוּ הַמִּיִּלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים
And it was because the midwives feared G-d that He made them houses. (1:21)

The pasuk earlier mentions that the midwives feared Hashem: וַתִּירָאן הַמִּיִּלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים – But the midwives feared G-d (1:17). Why is this repeated here?

The pasuk says (Tehillim 135:19-20), בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּרְכוּ אֶת ה', בֵּית אַהֲרֹן בָּרְכוּ אֶת ה'. בֵּית הַלְוִי בָרְכוּ אֶת ה', יִרְאֵי ה' בָּרְכוּ אֶת ה' – House of Yisrael, bless Hashem; House of Aharon, bless Hashem. House of Levi, bless Hashem; those who fear Hashem, bless Hashem. Yisrael, Aharon and Levi are all referred to in terms of their houses, but *yirei Hashem* are addressed directly. Why?

The answer is that while most people need a house to feel secure, those who truly fear Hashem recognize that a house, like everything else in this world, has no worth of its own. They long only to merit entering the House of Hashem. As for their own home – it is clear to them that it will endure only to the degree it is permeated with *yiras Shamayim*. Thus, there is no mention of the house of *yirei Hashem* – to them, *yiras Shamayim* defines, and is primary to, their house.

This is why the pasuk states here וַיְהִי כִּי יָרְאוּ הַמִּיִּלְדֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים. It was because Shifra and Puah recognized that *yiras Shamayim* is what upholds a house that they were granted houses, houses of *ruchniyus* that would endure forever – houses of *kehunah*, *leviyah*, and *malchus*.

(בנאות דשא – שמות תשפ"ג)

8 Speech is the mark of the internal *neshamah*. Also, one's sense of taste – which is an internal character of food – is in his tongue, which is used for speech as well.
9 See Sotah 11a
10 See Kiddushin 80b; Avodah Zarah 18b, with Rashi s.v. *V'ikka d'amri*
11 See Shabbos 33b

The End's What Counts

וּתְקַח צֶפְרָה צֶרֶת וּתְכַרֵת אֶת עֶרְלַת בְּנֵהּ

Tzipporah took a sharp stone and cut off the orlah of her son. (Shemos 4:25)

The *Acharonim* discuss a scenario where a *bris milah* is begun by one who is halachically unable to perform a *bris*, but completed by one who is able. Is the *milah* valid?¹²

The Gemara (*Avodah Zarah* 27a) discusses whether women are valid to perform a *bris*. The Gemara attempts to prove that they are, since Tzipporah performed her son's *bris*. The Gemara answers that Tzipporah only began the *milah*, while Moshe completed it. Says *Beis Yaakov*:¹³ This is proof that *milah* can be started by a person who is ineligible to perform one – since the Gemara's supposition is that women are invalid for *milah*, yet the Gemara accepts that Tzipporah could have started it.

If so, the question arises: How much of a *milah* must be performed by the person who is valid? Must he perform part of the actual *chituch* (incision), or is the *peri'ah* sufficient?¹⁴ *Beis Yaakov* asserts that one cannot prove from the above Gemara that *peri'ah* would suffice, because perhaps the *chituch* was completed by Moshe.

*Avodas Avodah*¹⁵ questions the Gemara's attempted proof that women are eligible to perform *milah*. Although Tzipporah did so, perhaps that wasn't proper? He answers that if so, the *malach* that threatened the child's life for his lack of *milah* wouldn't have backed off with Tzipporah's intervention.¹⁶

However, this leads to a problem. *Avodas Avodah* suggested that part of the *chituch* must be performed by one valid to perform a *milah*. If so, Tzipporah must have done only part of the *chituch*, so that Moshe could complete it. But if she didn't even do a full *chituch*, why did the *malach* release the child?

Perhaps the *malach* was meant only to warn Moshe to perform a *bris* on his child, so once the process was begun, the *malach* backed off.

Avodas Avodah, too, maintains that a *milah* begun by one unable to perform one, and completed by one able, is valid. He reasons: In scenarios where a *milah* is invalid, the halachah is that some blood is let out for the mitzvah of *milah* (*hatafas dam bris*). Accordingly, when one eligible to perform a *bris* completes a *milah* begun by one ineligible, it is certainly no worse than *hatafas dam bris*, and is valid.

But this is problematic. Firstly, this logic only addresses an ex-post facto situation, where a *bris* was improperly begun. But the question of whether it would be allowed remains unsettled. Secondly, it can occur that the completion of a *milah* does not involve loss of blood.¹⁷ If so, there is no proof from *hatafas dam bris*.

*Kli Chemdah*¹⁸ maintains the contrary: A *bris* begun by one invalid to perform a *milah* is not valid, even if it is completed by one able to do a *milah*. He proves this from a statement of the Gemara (*Shabbos* 133b), that if a *mohel* performs only part of a *milah* on Shabbos, he is not punished as a *mechallel Shabbos*, since he can argue that he did half the mitzvah and left the other half for others to do. Clearly, even the first stages of *milah* are part of the mitzvah. Just as regarding *shechitah*, if it is begun by one ineligible to *shecht*, it is invalid even if one eligible completes it, since the entire process is part of the mitzvah – the same is true of *milah*. Since the whole process is part of the mitzvah, any part of it performed by one ineligible invalidates the *milah*.¹⁹

However, it is clear otherwise from a *teshuvah* of the Rashba.²⁰ The Rashba writes of a case where a newborn baby boy was deathly ill, and needed to be circumcised before his

eighth day. The Rashba rules that since it is *pikuach nefesh*, it should be done; however, it is not a fulfillment of *milah*, but is merely a surgery. Accordingly, there is no difference if the circumcision is performed by a Jew or a non-Jew. The Rashba adds: If parts of the *orlah* remain after the surgery, a valid *mohel* should excise them after the baby's eighth day.

Clearly, the fact that part of the circumcision was performed by a non-Jew does not preclude the possibility of a valid *bris*, which an eligible Jew can perform on whatever can be excised.

But what of *Kli Chemdah's* parallel to *shechitah*? Just as an entire *shechitah* must be performed by one eligible to *shecht*, shouldn't the same be true of *milah*?

This question is addressed by Rav Menachem Ziemba,²¹ who explains that there is a distinction between *shechitah* and *milah*. An animal that has an obligation of *shechitah* on only one of its *simanim* (throat pipes),²² cannot have a kosher *shechitah*.²³ This is because by definition, *shechitah* must be on two *simanim* which are subject to *shechitah*. Since this animal has only one, it cannot be *shechted*. Contrast this with *milah*, where even if a boy is born mostly circumcised, the mitzvah is to remove whatever *orlah* he has.

Concludes Rav Ziemba: We may now understand the reason why a *shechitah* begun by one ineligible to *shecht* cannot be rectified even if completed by one eligible. Since by definition, *shechitah* needs two *simanim*, if one *siman* was cut improperly, the *shechitah* is invalidated. But in regard to *milah*, where the obligation is to excise whatever *orlah* is present, an improperly started *bris* can be rectified if it is completed by a valid *mohel*, since whatever he can excise is seen as the child's obligation of *bris milah*.

(בנאות דשא – שמות תשכ"ג)

12 See *Pischei Teshuvah*, Y.D. 264:3

13 *She'elos U'Teshuvos*, 104

14 *Ohr Same'ach* (*Hilchos Milah*, perek 2) takes this latter position.

15 *Avodah Zarah*, ibid

16 *He released him* (4:26).

17 See *Avnei Nezer*, Y.D. 334:27

18 *Shemos*, no. 2

19 Although the Gemara accepts that Tzipporah began her son's *bris*, *Kli Chemdah* argues that their obligation of *milah* was only as *bnei Keturah*.

20 Cited by *Beis Yosef*, beginning of *siman* 264

21 Cited in *Chiddushei HaGrama"z*, in a letter by Rav Yitzchak Yedidya Frankel.

22 For example, where a *ben pakua* has offspring with a regular animal, so that the young animal is only half-way obligated in *shechitah*.

23 See *Avnei Nezer*, O.C. 48:14