



Partners In Torah
San Diego Study Guide

Shemot
תשפג

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Partners Detroit

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Partners In Torah San Diego

Mission Statement:

Partners In Torah San Diego is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.

Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.

Partners in Torah San Diego has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.

Welcome.

Thank you for coming.

Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.

This coming Shabbat we begin reading the second book of the Torah, *Sefer Shemot*, the book of Exodus. The רמב"ן (*Ramban*) Nachmanides, calls this second book ספר הגאולה - "*The Book of Redemption.*" Despite Moshe and Aharon receiving most of the attention (along with Hashem!) for freeing the Jews from Egypt, without the crucial role played by women, the entire Exodus would not have happened. Although their contributions were behind the scenes, the Torah points them out to us so that we can appreciate their heroism and importance.

The Jewish people were fruitful and multiplied to the point where Egyptians were reviled by the Jews. The Pharaoh became concerned that the large number of Jews living in his country may one day join with his enemies and turn against him, so he sought to reduce their numbers. His first tactic was to enslave and oppress them with backbreaking work, which he thought, would weaken them so they would be unable to have children. Yet the Torah tells us that not only did this not work, it actually had the opposite effect (Exodus 1:12).

(יב) וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וְיִקְצוּ מִפָּנָיו בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

*12) But the **more they afflicted them, the more they increased and the more they spread out, and [the Egyptians] became disgusted because of the Israelites.***

So, Pharaoh tried something else. He had his taskmasters force the Jews to produce their quota of bricks, and, under, the pretense of increased productivity made them sleep in the fields. They claimed, "If you sleep at home, by the time we rouse you and get you to the fields, you won't be able to complete your work." He thought that this would surely impact the reproduction rate because the men were not permitted to return to their homes at night.

But this failed, too: Pharoah could not have imagined how great the Jewish women are and how they would react to the situation.

The Talmud (Sota 11b) informs us, *“In the merit of the righteous women who lived then, the Jews were redeemed from Egypt.”*

דרש רב עוירא: בשכר נשים צדקניות שהיו באותו הדור נגאלו ישראל ממצרים. בשעה שהולכות לשאוב מים, הקדוש ברוך הוא מזמן להם דגים קטנים בכדיהן ושואבות מחצה מים ומחצה דגים ובאות ושופתות שתי קדירות, אחת של חמין ואחת של דגים ומוליכות אצל בעליהן לשדה ומרחיצות אותן וסכות אותן ומאכילות אותן ומשקות אותן ונזקקות להן בין שפתים

Rabbi Avira taught. In the merit of the righteous women of that generation the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt. When the women drew water from the well, Hashem would bring small fish into their buckets such that they drew half water and half fish. They would divide their catch into two pots, put them on the stove, making one hot water and the other cooked fish. They would then take the two pots to their husbands in the fields where they had just finished a grueling day of work and were tired and spent. They would wash them with the hot water, feed them the fish, and give them to drink.

The Midrash (Tanchuma Pekudei 9) adds another interesting point of information to the story.

נוטלות המראות ומביטות בהן עם בעליהן זאת אומרת אני נאה ממך וזה אומר אני נאה ממך ומתוך כך היו מרגילין עצמן לידי תאוה ופרין ורבין

The women would also take mirrors out with them and look at themselves with their husbands in the mirrors, and banter with them to interest their husbands in them.

The tender loving care that the women gave their husbands in the fields after a grueling day of work strengthened them and gave them the moral support they so desperately needed. This, in turn, fostered

great love for their wives and resulted in many new children being born. This is how they brought about the redemption, for there needed to be a certain number of souls who would comprise the Jewish nation before they could be redeemed. Their conduct with their husbands brought forth those critical numbers.

The women's love and care for their husbands behind the scenes carried the day. Without their optimism and intervention, it would have taken much longer, and maybe, by then, the people would have been too far gone to be redeemed.

This is why although, generally, women are exempt from performing time dependent positive commandments such as sitting in a sukkah, or wearing tzitzit (a mitzvah only during the day), they are nevertheless obligated to drink the four cups of wine at the Pesach Seder.

Indeed, the Talmud, discussing the rules of the Passover Seder, (Pesachim 108b), explains:

ואמר רבי יהושע בן לוי נשים חייבות בארבעה כוסות הללו שאף הן היו באותו הנס
*Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, " Women are obligated to drink the four cups of wine (at the Passover Seder) **for even they were involved in the miracle of the salvation.***

The *Rashbam* (Rashi's grandson) comments on this passage of Talmud:

שאף הן היו באותו הנס - כדאמרינן (סוטה יא, ב) בשכר נשים צדקניות שבאותו הדור נגאלו, וכן גבי מקרא מגילה, נמי אמרינן הכי, דמשום דעל ידי אסתר נגאלו, וכן גבי נר חנוכה במסכת שבת (כג, א)

For even they were involved in the miracle... this refers to the Talmud (Sotah 11b), which says "In the merit of the righteous women who lived then, the Jews were redeemed from Egypt." Since the women were an

integral part of the redemption, their part is recognized by their obligation to drink the four cups of wine, which celebrate the redemption that they brought forth.

The Midrash adds an interesting aside. It notes that when Moshe later called for donations for the Tabernacle's construction, the women donated their precious mirrors. Initially, Moshe wanted to reject them as a tool of vanity and the basis for much evil, and, hence, found them unsuitable for the Tabernacle. But Hashem told Moshe,

א"ל הקב"ה למשה: משה על אלו אתה מבזה? המראות האלו הן
העמידו כל הצבאות הללו במצרים טול מהן ועשה מהן כיור נחשת וכנו לכהנים
שממנו יהיו מתקדשין הכהנים

"You are disgracing these mirrors? They are what brought forth all the multitudes of souls in Egypt. Take them and make them into a copper laver (urn for washing) for the Cohanim's sanctification before they begin their holy service."

We learn a great lesson from this Midrash, viz, that a woman's using a mirror to beautify herself for her husband is holy.

One night, Pharoah had a dream. In his dream he saw a balance scale with its two hanging pans. One held the whole country of Egypt; the other held a little goat. Yet the side with the goat outweighed the entire country of Egypt. This dream startled Pharoah who immediately called for his sorcerers. They told him that the goat represents a child who will be born to the Jews who would destroy the land of Egypt.

Pharoah then and there decided that he needed to kill the Jewish boys to preempt the birth of the Jewish savior. Initially, he attempted to do it secretly by instructing the midwives to kill the boys as they delivered them. Because babies occasionally die at birth, no one would suspect the conspiracy. The Torah tells us, however (Exodus 1:15-17):

(טו) וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילֵדוֹת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאִחַת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם
הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה,
(טז) וַיֹּאמֶר בְּיִלְדָכֶן אֶת הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וּרְאִיתֶן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהַמֶּתֶן
אֹתוֹ וְאִם בַּת הוּא וְחִיָּה
(יז) וַתִּירָאן הַמִּילֵדוֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וְלֹא עָשׂוּ כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֱלֹהֵי מֶלֶךְ
מִצְרַיִם וַתַּחְיֶינָן אֶת הַיְלָדִים

15) *The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, of whom the name of the first was **Shifrah** and the name of the second was **Puah**, - 16) “When you deliver the Hebrew women, and you see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, kill him, and if it is a daughter, let her live.” 17) *But the midwives feared Hashem and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, **and they caused the boys to live.****

Who were Shifrah and Puah? The Sages teach us that they are nicknames for Yocheved (Moshe and Aharon’s mother) and Miriam (their older sister). *Shifrah* comes from the word “to beautify.” Because Yocheved would clean and beautify the babies, she was called *Shifrah*, and Miriam would “*pooh*” and make other calming noises to the babies to quiet them down, so she was called *Puah*.

But not only did they defy Pharaoh by not killing the baby boys, they even helped the babies live. Shifra and Puah risked their lives in direct violation of the king’s order. Indeed, when confronted by Pharaoh, they “explained” that they couldn’t reach the Jewish women quickly enough before they gave birth. As a reward for their heroism, Hashem rewarded them by causing the Jewish nation to proliferate even more. As it says in the verse (Exodus 1:20),

(כ) וַיִּיטֹב אֱלֹקִים לְמִילֵדוֹת וַיַּרְבּ הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֶמוּ מְאֹד

20) Hashem benefited the midwives, and the nation became numerous and strong.

Their greatest possible reward for them was that the Jewish mothers should have more and more babies for them to deliver.

The Chofetz Chaim explains that the midwives' fear of Hashem was manifest in their not resigning their positions, concerned as they were that perhaps a lesser person would take the job and actually kill the baby boys. Therefore, they kept their positions and did not kill the babies, instead, helping them to live.

They also received a personal reward for their great fear of Hashem. The verse (21) tells us,

(כא) וַיְהִי כִּי יָרְאוּ הַמִּיּוֹלְדוֹת אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים

21) Because the midwives feared Hashem, He made them houses.

What are these "houses?" Rashi quotes the Midrash that says that the houses were houses of Cohanim, Levites, and kings. The Cohanim and Levites came from Yocheved through her husband Amram, Levi's grandson. Their sons were thus Levites, and Aharon became first Cohen. Kings came from Miriam because King David was her descendant. Through their fear of Hashem, these women merited that their descendants be the leaders of the Jewish people. The Cohanim and Levites were the spiritual leaders, and the kings were in charge of all the nation's affairs. The connection is very simple and clear. A leader's most important quality is a strong fear of Hashem so that he doesn't compromise the interests of his subjects for his own petty or selfish reasons. Yocheved and Miriam endowed all their progeny with this quality of fear of Hashem, which would empower their children to lead the people to serve Hashem faithfully.

Yocheved, Levi's daughter, granddaughter of Yaakov, was one of the seventy souls who came down to Egypt with Yaakov's family, and she was born just as they entered the land of Egypt. The Torah tells us that the Jewish people were in Egypt for 210 years, and that Moshe was 80 years old when he stood before Pharaoh. A simple calculation yields that Yocheved was 130 (!) years old when she gave birth to Moshe. Miriam was five years older than Moshe while Aharon was three years older. Yocheved's husband, father to these three amazing children, was Amram, the son of Kehat, Levi's son. This makes Yocheved his aunt, but since they were born from two different mothers and the Torah was not yet given, they were allowed to marry. It is unknown how long they were married before these children were born, but it was time for the redemption, and each child would play a significant role.

The midwives would not kill the baby boys, and Pharaoh's stargazers informed him that the savior of the Jewish people had been conceived. They also informed him that they see that his downfall will come about through water. (They thought that this meant that he would drown.) Based on this, Pharaoh decreed that all newborn baby boys should be thrown into the river. (Stargazers receive only approximate sketchy information, and it was only true in a way. It represented the water that Moshe brought from the rock through hitting it instead of speaking to it, that was the problem for Moshe.)

This is where the Torah begins the story of Moshe, his birth and miraculous survival. Yet the Torah quite cryptically describes it (Exodus 2:1):

(א) וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת בַּת לֵוִי

1) And a man from the house of Levi married the daughter of Levi.

The continuing verses tell us that she became pregnant and gave birth to a child who lit up the room. This child was Moshe. Apparently,

Amram married Yocheved, and she gave birth to Moshe. But, weren't they married already with two children, Miriam and Aharon? What's the story behind this mysterious marriage?

Our Sages explain that when Pharaoh decreed that all male babies must be thrown into the river, Amram publicly divorced his wife Yocheved, deeming it unethical to have children only to have them thrown into the river. Because Amram was the nation's leader, the rest of the nation followed his example and divorced their wives.

Amram's five-year-old daughter, Miriam, then said to him, "Father, your decree is worse than Pharaoh's! His applies only on the boys; but your decree applies to the boys and to the girls." After hearing his young daughter, he recapitulated and publicly remarried his wife. It is to this re-marriage that the verse above refers. On the advice of his young daughter, Amram remarried Yocheved. When he did this, the rest of the nation followed. She conceived Moshe and the savior of Israel was born.

There is a nice aside here that a tenth-grade student thought of. Amram, the greatest Jew of the time and leader of the people, humbled himself and took the advice of his five-year old daughter; as a result, he fathered the man whom the Torah called the humblest man on the face of the earth, Moshe.

First, Miriam helped her mother keep the Jewish boys alive at birth, and, here again, she plays a crucial role in the birth of Moshe. If not for her clear thinking and question to her father, who knows what would have happened.

There was actually something before this that Miriam did. After Aharon's birth, Amram and Yocheved decided not to have any more children. Our Sages tell us that Miriam had a prophesy. "My father and

mother will have a child who will save the Jewish people from Egypt.” Based on her prophesy, they decided to have another child, who fulfilled the prophesy.

Exodus 2:2

(ב) וַתֵּהָרֵהּ הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן וַתֵּרְאֵהוּ אֶתֵּן כִּי טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְחִים :

2. *The woman (Yocheved, Moshe’s mother) conceived and gave birth to a son. **She saw that he was good** and she hid him for three months:*

What does “*she saw that he was good*” mean? Does not every mother see her child as special and good? But there was something extraordinary about this child. Rashi explains that he lit up the whole room. The Midrash tells us further that Moshe was born circumcised. This was obviously a very holy child destined for greatness, who would escape Pharaoh’s evil decree to kill all Jewish baby boys.

They hid him for three months, and when they could hide him no longer, they put him in a basket in the river, hoping someone would find him and have mercy on him. Miriam, who had prophesied that her parents would give birth to the savior of the Jewish nation and was sure that something miraculous would happen to her special baby brother, stationed herself nearby among the reeds to see how the events would unfold. It didn’t take long. Indeed, of all people, Pharaoh’s daughter Bitya discovered the basket when she went to bathe. She immediately realized that he was a Jewish baby trying to escape her father’s harsh decree. This could easily have become a disaster, because, as the daughter of the Pharaoh, she had an obligation to kill the child in compliance with her father’s evil decree. But when she saw the glow of the child, her compassion overwhelmed her and she decided to save him and raise him in the palace. This was a miracle.

She named the child Moshe, which means “I drew him from the water.” Interestingly, even though Moshe’s parents had given him a name at birth (among them Avigdor and Yekutiel), the name Moshe, given to him by Bitya, is the name that Hashem used. This is to recognize her kindness in saving him from death.

We thus have another woman who played a crucial role in the freedom of the Jewish people, and we are reminded of her every time we mention *Moshe* the name that she gave him.

After Pharaoh’s daughter saved Moshe, she gave him to Egyptian wet nurses to nurse him, but he refused to nurse. Why would Moshe not nurse from an Egyptian woman? The Talmud says that since his mouth was destined to speak with Hashem, it would be inappropriate for it to nurse from a non-Jewish woman. At this point, Miriam, who witnessed the developments, came forth and asked, “*Shall I go and summon for you a wet nurse from the Hebrew nation, who will nurse the boy for you?*” Upon receiving an affirmative answer, Miriam called Moshe’s mother Yocheved to nurse him. Bitya also paid her for her services. Here again, Miriam played a crucial role in Moshe’s life.

How ironic! Here Pharaoh went to such great lengths to kill the Jewish boy that would take the Jewish people out of slavery and lay waste to the land of Egypt, and Hashem has him raise the child in his own palace. Hashem will always get His way.

After the Jewish nation experienced the ultimate salvation of Hashem and walked through the sea on dry land with the water forming walls on their right and their left (to be read in three weeks), they sang a song of praise to Hashem. The Torah tells us that the women under Miriam’s leadership, also sang a song of praise to Hashem (Exodus 15:20,21).

(כ) וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֶחָת אֶהָרָן אֶת הַתֵּף בְּיָדָהּ וַתִּצְאֶן כָּל הַנָּשִׁים
:אַחֲרֶיהָ בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֹת

(כא) וַתַּעַן לָהֶם מִרְיָם שִׁירָו לַיהוָה כִּי גָאָה גָאָה סוּס וְרֹכְבּוֹ רָמָה בָּיָם

20) *Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aharon, took the drum in her hand and all the women went forth after her with drums and with dances. 21) Miriam spoke up to them, “Sing to Hashem for He is exalted above the arrogant, having hurled horse with its rider into the sea.”*

This one sentence is all that the women sang, yet it is considered a great praise to Hashem. What was meaningful about this to the women?

The common thread weaving through all of the above-cited examples of the women who made a difference is that the events all happened behind the scenes, with no fanfare. Here lies the real power of a Torah woman. A proper Torah woman sees her role as an “*enabler*.” She is the one behind the scenes making sure that things get done and done properly, but she wants no fame or glory for it. She derives her satisfaction from knowing that she has been the one who got it done. She is not looking for notoriety or attention, just to do what then needs to be done.

At the Sea, the horses were hurled in and killed just like their evil riders, who were pursuing the Jews to kill them. The horses had no evil intent, so why did *they* die? Because they enabled the riders to fulfill their evil wishes, and Hashem considers them just as culpable as the riders.

If the horses were given a punishment equal to the rider for being the “enablers,” how much more should the women be rewarded for their roles as “enablers” to their husbands and children. When they enable their husbands to learn Torah or perform mitzvot, or when they enable their children to grow in Torah by taking them to school, learning with them, feeding them, etc., they will receive equal reward to those who actually did the mitzvah, since they were the ones who prepared the way for them to perform them. This was the praise that the women gave Hashem.

The Torah, and subsequently its adherents, give the greatest degree of respect to women. In the book of Genesis, we are introduced to the Matriarchs who are partners to the Patriarchs in building the great Jewish nation. Indeed, according to the Torah, the woman determines the identity of a Jewish child. If his mother is Jewish, so is he, regardless of who his father is. There can be no more important a contribution to a child than his essence and identity. The woman creates the home in which the child will grow and learn. She creates the home for her husband to grow in. She is like the unseen foundation upon which all good stands, and without which, nothing useful can be built or stand.

With so many instances of women playing crucial roles in the exodus, why isn't more of a deal made of it? Why aren't these women more widely publicized for their actions? This derives from the woman's inherent modesty and what is described in the verse (Psalms 45:14):

(יד) כָּל כְּבוֹדָהּ בֵּית מַלְךָ פְּנִימָה

14) Every honorable princess, dwells within.