



Partners In Torah

San Diego-Los Angeles-Ventura

Take home Dvar Torah

תשפ"ה שְׁמוֹת

January 14, 2025

By: Rabbi Avi Cohen

Hello, Welcome!

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

Thank you for joining us!

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

This coming Shabbat we begin the Torah's second book, Shemot. After just a few verses, we learn of Levi's death at age 137. This noteworthy "statistic" had extraordinary significance, for it marked the beginning of our slavery in Egypt. As long as any of Yaakov's children remained alive, servitude could not begin. And when it finally did, it was somewhat subtle, commencing gradually with the midwives, Shifra and Puah, being told to secretly kill the Jewish baby boys. Soon thereafter, all Jewish male babies are being thrown into the Nile River. And with these atrocities came back-breaking work. Full Egyptian enslavement had started.

In chapter 2 we learn about the birth of Moshe the savior and his miraculous escape from death in the river by Bitya, the Pharaoh's daughter. Although Moshe was raised in the Kings palace, he knew he was Jewish and had a very deep love and respect for his people. When, at the age of 18, he happened upon an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Jew, Moshe could not tolerate it; he killed the Egyptian, burying him in the sand. when news of this "crime" got out, Moshe had to flee for his life to Midyan where he married Tziporah and had sons, Gershom and Eliezer.

Although slavery had begun after Levi's death, the onset of the truly harsh servitude was not for another 30 years, coinciding with the birth of Miriam, Moshe's older sister by 6 years, and lasting 86 years. Moshe fled Egypt to Midyan and remained there until, at age 80, Hashem engaged him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt.



In the course of those 86 years, the Egyptians committed horrific acts against their Jewish slaves. The Pharaoh's executioners would choke Jewish babies and bury them in the construction of their buildings. Their cries from within the walls were audible. The Egyptians would also throw Jewish babies into a furnace as sacrifices to their gods. When Pharaoh was stricken with *tzaraat* (a type of skin disease), to cure it he needed to bathe in the blood of 150 Jewish babies in the morning and 150 Jewish babies in the evening. It is impossible to imagine the Jewish people's pain and suffering, and they cried out to Hashem in pain. Hashem heard their cries and decided that it was time to begin the redemption.

From birth, Moshe had been chosen to fulfill this mission. He was in Midyan tending his father in law's sheep and was endowed with the qualities necessary for the position. Hashem only needed to contact him and enlist him in His service. This first encounter with Moshe would need to be impressive, something that would be compelling to Moshe and convince him to take the job of Hashem's "shepherd." What would that be?

The Torah teaches us (Exodus 3:1-4).

- (א) וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֵנוּ כִּהְיָן מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵבָה
(ב) וַיֵּרָא מִלְאָךְ יְדוּד אֵלָיו בְּלִבַּת אִשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסִּנֵּה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסִּנֵּה אֵינָנוּ אֲכָל
(ג) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרָה נָא וְאֶרְאֶה אֶת הַמַּרְאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא יִבְעַר הַסִּנֵּה
(ד) וַיֵּרָא יְדוּד כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסִּנֵּה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי

1) Moshe was shepherding the sheep of Yitro his father-in-law, the priest of Midyan: he guided the sheep far into the wilderness, and he arrived at the mountain of Hashem, toward Horev. 2) An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw, and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed. 3) Moshe

thought, "I will turn aside now and look at this great sight. – why will the bush not be burned?" 4) Hashem saw that he turned aside to see; and Hashem called out to him from amid the bush and said, "Moshe, Moshe," and he replied, "Here I am!"

What was Hashem's thinking, so to speak, in appearing to Moshe in a burning bramble bush?

Our Sages explain that although Moshe was safe and sound in Midyan and under no oppression whatsoever, his mind never left his brothers and sisters in Egypt. He was constantly thinking about them and feeling pain about their plight. Many thoughts crossed his mind as to why they were not being redeemed, and he had serious doubts if they would survive the Egyptian bondage. The burning bush answered many of Moshe's concerns:

His first concern was that perhaps Hashem had forgotten about the Jewish people or had no interest in redeeming them.

To this, the burning bush provided the following answer.

Rashi tells us:

מתוך הסנה - ולא אילן אחר משום עמו אנכי בצרה

A bramble bush and no other tree - to show that Hashem is in pain, so to speak, with the Jewish people's pain.

The first thing that Hashem wanted Moshe to know is that He is also suffering along with the Jewish people in Egypt. It pains Hashem when his children must undergo pain. He acutely feels what they are going through, and it pains Hashem greatly to have to put them through it. One can easily ignore someone else's pain, but not his own. Therefore, Hashem has every reason to want to redeem them: to relieve His own pain.

This concept applies to each and every Jew that experiences pain, no matter the form. Hashem feels that person's pain and suffers along with him.

This could be compared to a parent who must punish his child by grounding him from an event that he wants desperately to attend. While the child is miserable, crying, and screaming from his room how he is missing out on the event for which he waited so long, the parent is also feeling terrible that he must put his child through it. He wishes there was a way to allow his child to go and still make the point that he needs to make, but after thinking it over again and again, he finds no other option.

It goes without saying that just as no parents would put their child and themselves through an abhorrent ordeal if it were not necessary, so, too, Hashem would not.

Moshe's second concern was that perhaps the Jewish people had sunk to such a low level that they would be unworthy of redemption. They had worshipped idols just like the Egyptians. The burning bush also addressed this concern.

The Midrash says:

שאל גוי אחד את ר"י בן קרחה מה ראה הקב"ה לדבר עם משה מתוך הסנה א"ל
אלו מתוך חרוב או מתוך שקמה כך היית שואלני אלא להוציאך חלק א"א למה מתוך
הסנה ללמדך שאין מקום פנוי בלא שכינה אפילו סנה

A gentile one asked Rabbi Yehoshua ben Karcha. "Why did Hashem speak to Moshe from a bramble bush?" Rabbi Yehoshua answered him, "If Hashem had appeared to him in a carob tree or a sycamore tree, you would have asked me the same question, but I will answer you nevertheless. It is to teach you that there is no place too low for Hashem's presence to dwell."

We learn here that no matter how low the Jewish people sink, Hashem will always be with them. We may look like a bramble bush, but the fire of Hashem still dwells among us.

Hashem told Moshe (Exodus 3:5) *"Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground."*

If the place upon which Moshe stood was holy ground, then the bush - representing Jewish nation - is also planted in holy ground. Hashem was telling Moshe that despite its prickly dry branches, its roots were rooted and nourished from the holy wellsprings of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs from whom they stem. The only reason they look dry and brittle with no leaves or fruit is because the fire of exile, the Egyptian slavery, is influencing in them. But the second that they exit that hostile environment, they will shine brightly with the holiness that was planted within them by their forefathers and foremothers.

Hashem as much as told Moshe this when He said (3:12), *“The Jewish people will serve Me on this mountain.”*

The burning bush took place on Mount Sinai, and Hashem told Moshe that the Jewish nation would return to this mountain to receive the Torah. A mere fifty days after leaving Egypt the Jewish people were holy enough to stand at Mount Sinai and hear Hashem speak to them. This was the proof that it was only a temporary situation while they were immersed in the Egyptian depravity that they were like the bramble bush. The second they left Egypt, the seeds of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs blossomed and produced fruit.

A third concern was that perhaps there would be no one left to redeem. The Egyptians may overwhelm the Jewish people until they assimilated to extinction!

The Midrash teaches us that the burning bush addressed this concern as well. The verse says, *“and behold! The bush was burning in the fire but the bush was not consumed”*.

וירא והנה הסנה בוער באש מיכן אמרו האש של מעלה מעלה לולבין ושורפת ואינה אוכלת והיא שחורה האש של מטה אינה מעלה לולבין והיא אדומה ואוכלת ואינה שורפת ולמה הראה לו הקב"ה למשה בענין הזה לפי שהיה מחשב בלבו ואומר שמא יהיו המצריים מכלין את ישראל לפיכך הראהו הקב"ה אש בוערת ואיננו אוכל א"ל כשם שהסנה בוער באש ואיננו אוכל כך המצריים אינן יכולין לכלות את ישראל

The Sages have learned from here that fire that originates from Heaven is black, has flames and flickers, it but doesn't consume anything as it burns. Earthly fire is red, has flames, and consumes as it burns. Why did Hashem show Moshe this? Because Moshe was concerned that the Egyptians are going to consume the Jewish people. Therefore, Hashem showed him a fire that burns but doesn't consume. The message was, just as the bush is enveloped in flames but is not consumed, so too the Egyptians will not be able to consume the Jewish people either.

There is a subtle but deep message conveyed here.

This past week we have all witnessed fire's awesome destructive power. Fire is merciless and leaves nothing but ash in its wake. Billions of dollars' worth of homes and property were rendered absolutely worthless in a matter of minutes. This is true of earthy fire. What it consumes is its fuel, and therefore it destroys as it burns.

Holy fire, which emanates from heaven, does not require combustible material to burn. Its source is from Hashem, so it doesn't destroy anything.

Similarly, Hashem placed the Jewish people in exile for us to improve ourselves. This fire is Heavenly and is not designed to consume us as its fuel. It is a fire like the fire in the burning bush that did not consume the bush. The Jewish people will always survive.

Every one of Moshe's concerns apply to the Jewish people today in our current exile as we look forward to the complete redemption by the Mashiach.

Perhaps Hashem had forgotten about the Jewish people or has no interest in redeeming us.

To this we can say that we have personally witnessed Hashem's kindness and miracles for His beloved people. Consider the recent miracle of the 39 Iranian scud missiles that killed only one person, and the miracles that happened to so many on Simchat Torah of last year. Or

the thousands of missiles, drones, and bombs that were fired at Israel with virtually no casualties. The list goes on and on. Hashem is clearly going out of His way to assure us that He is with us in our exile, and that He is preparing the redemption for us.

Perhaps the Jewish people have sunk to such a low level that they are not worthy of redemption.

There is an interesting dichotomy that exists within the Jewish nation today. On the one hand, many Jews have chosen to neglect (or even reject) their Jewish heritage and follow the ways of the world, with no connection to their Jewish roots at all.

On the other hand, a very substantial group of Jews maintain strong connections to their Jewish roots and are growing stronger and stronger every day. In a very significant way, among these people Judaism in exile is stronger today than it has been in many years. Yeshivas teem with rabbinic students, day schools are full of children eager to learn Torah, and *kollels* (groups of married men who dedicate their lives to the study of Torah) abound. In our city alone there are 9 different *kollels*, all manned by bright, idealistic Torah scholars who have chosen to dedicate their lives to study Torah. Shuls are popping up everywhere to accommodate the prayer and Torah learning needs of the growing committed Jewish community. This phenomenon is true all over the country, despite the hostile, destructive, anti-spiritual world in which we live.

Although this group is dwarfed in number by the former, the immeasurable holiness and goodness that emanates from their daily holy lives creates an extremely powerful force of holiness and good in the world that is great enough to offset the effects of the evil. This group has proven itself worthy of redemption.

Perhaps there will be no one left to redeem. The current society may overwhelm the Jewish people until they have assimilated to extinction!

As long as we remain loyal to the Torah and its values and morals, we are protected from assimilation. The Torah's ways are so different than those of the surrounding nations, and by keeping them, we are, by definition, unique and separate. Another important component in the battle against assimilation is belonging to a Torah community. Each person supports the other and creates a protected society. There are strong Jewish communities across the country fulfilling this need.

The Midrash gives us yet another lesson from the burning bush.

א"ר פנחס הכהן ב"ר חמא מה הסנה הזה כשאדם מכניס ידו לתוכו אינו מרגיש וכשהוא מוציאה מסתרטת כך כשירדו ישראל למצרים לא הכיר בהן בריה כשיצאו יצאו באותות ובמופתים ובמלחמה

Rabbi Pinchos HaKohen bar Chama said, "Just as when one puts his hand into the bramble bush, he doesn't feel it (because the thorns are pointed downwards), but when he pulls his hand out his hand gets all cut up, so, too, when the Jewish people went down to Egypt, no one noticed it, but when they left, there were great signs and miracles and wars."

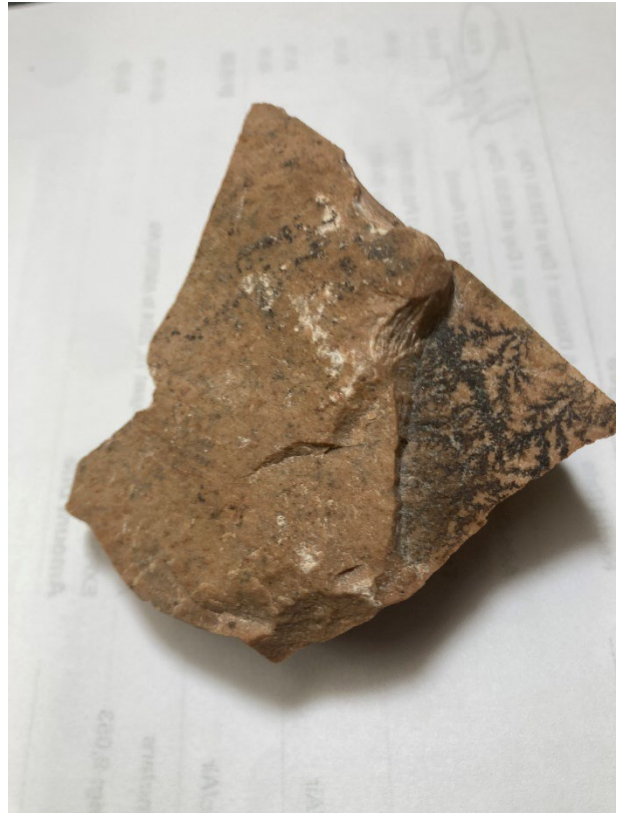
The same will be true with the future redemption. We came into exile very quietly, but when Mashiach comes there will be tremendous miracles and signs from Hashem. May we all merit this great day soon.

On a side note. Rabbi Shamai Ginzberg brings the following quote in his sefer *Imray Shammai* (Exodus 3:2) regarding the miraculous bush that Moshe experienced.

א) בבאור נרבוני למורה נבוכים חלק א' פרק ט"ו כתוב בזה הלשון, ומה שראיתי אני בעצמי מסכים לזה אעירך עליו, דע כי הר סיני העידו עליו שהאבנים הנמצאות בו מצוייר עליהם הסנה, ולכן נקרא ההר ההוא סיני, על שם הסנה, כמו שנגלה השם למשה מתוך הסנה, ואחד מנכבדי ברצילונה מבני חסדאי הביא עמו מהאבנים ההם, והראם לי אחד מתלמידי בני משפחתו, וראיתי בו הסנה מצויר

בתכלית הציור, ציור אלהי בגוון מתחלף לגוון האבן, ושברתי האבן לחצאין ונמצא הסנה מצויר בשטח כל חלק, וכן חלקתי כל חלק לחצאין ונמצא הסנה מצויר כל חלק בפנימיותו, וכן פעמים רבות עד תום החלקים כדמות הבונים ועדיין הסנה בהם, ונפלאתי מזה ושמחתי עליו, כי הוא דרך להבין כונת הרב ז"ל, עכ"ל הנרבוני

Norvony, a commentary to the Rambam's Guide to the Perplexed, writes: "I will tell you what I saw that supports this. They have testified about Mount Sinai that the stones on it have a picture of a bush on them. That is why Mount Sinai is called Sinai because of the "sneh" (bush) in which Hashem appeared to Moshe. One of the respected members of the Barcelona Jewish Community brought with him some of those stones and one of his relatives showed them to me. In it I saw a



picture of a bush very clearly depicted. A heavenly image in a color that contrasts to the color of the stone. I broke the stone in half, and I found a picture of a bush on each half. I proceeded to break each piece into half again and on the inside (the surface of the break) there was a picture of the bush. I broke the stone many times, and the picture of the bush was on each piece until I could break it no further. I was amazed at this, and I rejoiced over it, because with this information we can better understand the words of the master (the Rambam).