



## **Sicha Summary**

Chelek 15 | Shemos | Sichah 2

### **Negating the Nile:**

Yocheved hid her son, Moshe, in a wicker basket, and placed it on the bank of the Nile river. (*Shemos 2:3*, see *Targum* there) After Pharaoh's daughter, Batya, came to bathe in the river, the basket slipped into the river, where she then discovered and rescued the baby boy. (*Ibid*, 2:5)

Rabbi Yosef Rosen explains why Moshe was not initially placed in the river: The Nile was an object of Egyptian idol worship; it is forbidden to use an idolatrous entity, even to save a life.

The *Talmud* teaches, however, that when Batya came to immerse in the river, her intention was to cleanse herself of the idolatry of her father's home. (*Sotah 12b*) By renouncing Egyptian idolatry by bathing in the Nile itself, Batya nullified the idolatrous status of the river. Moshe, therefore, could then descend into the river itself for protection. (*Tzfnas Pa'aneach al Hatorah, Shemos 2:3*)

### **Negating the Decree:**

The *Midrash* describes another consequence of Moshe being placed in the Nile. Pharaoh made a decree to "throw every baby boy into the river" based on the prediction of his astrologers that the savior of the Jewish people would meet his end through water. If every boy was drowned, Pharaoh reasoned, he would have eliminated any potential redeemer. But when Moshe was placed in the Nile, the astrologers mistakenly read the stars as saying that the Jewish savior was drowned in the river. Pharaoh's decree was therefore suspended because of its apparent success.

### **The Question:**

Moshe being placed in the Nile, therefore, accomplished two things: The Nile was no longer an object of worship, and the decree to drown baby boys in the Nile was annulled. What is the thematic connection between these two outcomes?

**The Explanation:**

If we probe deeper, Pharaoh's decree was really an expression of Egypt's idolatrous worship of the Nile.

Egypt's economy relied on the Nile flooding periodically to irrigate its crops. Egyptians never had to look to the heavens for rain. They came to "idolize" the natural rhythm of the river, and ascribe all of their success to its godlike power. Thus, the Nile represented Egypt's hubris and their denial of an omnipotent G-d. The Nile, and the rule of nature it embodied, were their gods.

The deeper, metaphorical meaning of the decree was to "drown" Jewish children, extinguishing their innate faith, in the "Nile," i.e., in the Egyptian obsession with materiality, nature, and fate.

But the Jewish people were only susceptible to this "drowning" because they had descended into Egypt and lost contact with the earlier generations who had dwelled in the Land of Israel. In Israel, a person looked to Heaven for rain to irrigate the fields. It was a land that cultivated faith. Once the people lost their living memory of Israel, they were susceptible to the seduction of the Nile.

The response to the allure of the Nile and to the decree was for the Jews to internalize their faith. Moshe is called a "shepherd of faith" because he was able to arouse the innate faith of the Jewish people in exile. His very birth was a fitting response to the Nile's "power," and to the decree to drown Jewish children in the worship of nature.

And so, when Moshe was born, the Nile's idolatrous identity was broken, the decree was lifted, and the process of redemption began.

**The Lesson:**

Every day begins for us with acute spiritual awareness through prayer; it then descends to intellectual appreciation of G-d through Torah study, and then further descends to the workplace, where G-d is, for the most part, hidden.

This is similar to the Jewish people's progression from the Land of Israel where they apprehended G-d plainly, to their early days in Egypt where they subsisted on memories of the Divine reality that their parents had experienced, to the enslavement in Egypt where all Divine awareness was absent.

Just as in Egypt, where internalized faith is what brought the Jews out of exile, so too, by a person revealing his own "inner Moshe" of innate faith, he is able to achieve a spiritual exodus, and to perceive the Divine, even in the material world.