



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Shemos | Sichah 2

The Moshe In Me

Translated by Rabbi Kivi Greenbaum

General Editor: Rabbi Eliezer Robbins | Copy Editor: Rabbi Y. Eliezer Danzinger

Content Editor: Rabbi Sholom Zirkind

A note on the translation: Rounded parentheses and square brackets reflect their use in the original *sichah*; squiggly parentheses are interpolations of the translator or editor. The footnotes in squiggly parentheses are those of the translators or editors and do not correspond to the footnotes in the original. Considerable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the translation, while at the same time maintaining readability. The translation, however, carries no official authority. As in all translations, the possibility of inadvertent errors exists.

Your feedback is needed — please send all comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org

1.

MOSHE IN THE NILE

On the verse,¹ “And she placed it among the reeds at the **bank** of the river,”² the *Targum*³ explains that this means on the **shore** of the river. This shows us that Yocheved {Moshe’s mother,} placed the “reed basket” with Moshe (not in the river itself, but) on the **dry** shore **next** to the river.⁴

However, the continuation of the scriptural narrative implies that the basket was not on the “bank of the river,” but rather among the “reeds” that were **in** the river. As the verse says further, “She called his name Moshe... because **from the water** I drew him.”

The Rogatchover⁵ explains⁶ that since “the {Egyptians} worshiped the Nile,”⁷ Yocheved was not permitted to save Moshe by placing his basket in the river (since the law⁸ prohibits the use of idolatry even to save a life.) Therefore “she placed it among the reeds on the **bank** of the river.” Afterward, however, “the daughter of Pharaoh went down to the river to bathe,”⁹ which is expounded as meaning that “she went down to cleanse herself from the idols of her father.”¹⁰ By doing so, she **nullified** the idolatry, “and then the basket went into the river.”

¹ *Shemos* 2:3

² {After the verse describes that to avoid Pharaoh’s murderous decree, Moshe’s birth was secret, it now describes how his mother Yocheved hid him from the authorities in a reed basket.}

³ Onkelos.

⁴ With this we can answer the question (raised by Abarbanel and others) simply: How could Yocheved have placed Moshe into a river, a place of danger?

⁵ {Rabbi Yosef Rozen (1858 – 1936). Rabbi in Dvinsk, Latvia. Known as the “Rogatchover,” since he hailed from the city of Rogatchev, Belarus.}

⁶ *Tzofnas Paneach Al Hatorah*, loc. cit.

⁷ *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*VaEira*,” sec. 13; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 9, sec. 9; Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 7:17.

⁸ *Pesachim* 25a; *Rambam*, “*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*,” ch.5, sec. 6-7; *Tur* and *Shulchan Aruch*, *Yoreh De’ah*, sec. 155.

⁹ *Shemos* 2:5.

¹⁰ *Sotah* 12b; *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Shemos*,” sec. 7; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, sec. 23.

2.

THE DECREE

The *Midrash* says,¹¹ “Why was Moshe thrown into the river? So the astrologers would think that he was already thrown into the water {by the Egyptian authorities, and drowned} and would discontinue searching for him.” The decree [of Pharaoh] that “every boy born must be thrown into the river”¹² came about because the astrologers foresaw that “the savior of Israel would be judged with water.” Therefore, Yocheved “threw” Moshe into the river (so that “they would discontinue searching for him”),¹³ because “once Moshe was thrown into the water {the astrologers} declared that the savior of Israel had been thrown into the water, and they immediately nullified the decree {that every boy must be drowned}.”¹⁴ {This act of Yocheved} nullified the decree that “every boy born should be thrown into the river.”

Since every idea in Torah is precise, it is understood that the two things that were nullified in connection with Moshe being thrown into the river — namely: a) the idolatrous nature of the Nile; and b) the decree of “every boy...” — are interconnected and are both related to Moshe, the redeemer of Israel.

3.

SERVING THE NILE

We can understand these connections by first explaining the deeper purpose of the decree that “every boy born should be thrown into the river.” The Torah doesn’t just inform us of Pharaoh’s overall decree that “if a boy {is born}, **kill** him,” but it also adds a description of how it was to be carried out: **“throw them into the river.”**

¹¹ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, sec. 21.

¹² *Shemos* 1:22.

¹³ *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 1, sec. 21.

¹⁴ *Shemos Rabbah* ch. 1, sec. 24.

[It is understood that this was not just a detail of Pharaoh's decree.¹⁵ Moreover, it was not just a detail explaining the reason for the decree, namely, "They {the astrologers} saw that the redeemer of Israel would be judged with water," and therefore Pharaoh ordered that "every son born should be thrown in **the river**." {The Torah's mention of this detail must have a greater message} because ultimately, what difference does knowing this detail make? (Its mention is what first raises the question as to why {Pharaoh issued the decree}.)]

Rather this detail was a **fundamental** characteristic of the Egyptian exile, one which depicts the central theme of the Egyptian exile.

To explain: The goal of Pharaoh's decree was "throwing them **into the river**," i.e., into the **Nile** — the deity of Egypt. Meaning to say, Pharaoh wanted the Jews to be {spiritually} "thrown" into, and "drowned" by, the idolatry of Egypt.

4.

WORSHIPING NATURE

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile simply because this river was (naturally) the source of their livelihood. As known,¹⁶ Egypt has no rainfall, and any agriculture depends on the Nile "rising" and "watering" the fields.

Ultimately, this allowed {the Egyptians} to delude themselves into believing that the livelihood and sustenance of Egypt did not, G-d forbid, come from Hashem.

[When a land depends on rain, "everyone turns their eyes upward,"¹⁷ and sense their reliance on Hashem. However, in Egypt {which depended

¹⁵ {Otherwise, the Torah would not have informed us of this.}

¹⁶ Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 41:1, 47:10, *Shemos* 7:17, 7:19; Rashi's commentary on *Sotah* 13a, s.v., "kedei"; see *Sifri* (and *Yalkut Shimoni*) on *Devarim* 11:10 and Rashi's commentary, loc. cit., et al.

¹⁷ *Bereishis Rabbah*, ch. 13, sec. 9.

on} the Nile “rising and watering,” their dependency on Hashem was not obvious.]

Rather, they relied on the (nature of) the Nile. Therefore, this devolved into the idolatry of Egypt.

This is {the deeper meaning of} Pharaoh’s decree: “Throw them into the river” so that the Jews should also, G-d forbid, be subject to the rules of nature.

5.

GOING DOWN TO EGYPT

The decree to “throw them into the river” was only able to hold influence over the Jews after their **descent** into Egypt. As long as they were in the land of Israel, “a land which... the eyes of Hashem your L-rd are on it,”¹⁸ it was **clear** that Hashem orchestrated every detail {of their existence}.

[This was also evident from the fact that Israel was always¹⁹ a land that “absorbs water from the rains of **Heaven**,”²⁰ and especially, from what our Sages say,²¹ “the land of Israel is watered by Hashem Himself.”]

There was no room to mistakenly think that “my strength and the might of my hand has accumulated this wealth for me.”²² {There was no room for a person to mistakenly think that he} plowed and sowed and that was enough, because it was obvious that “it is He who gives you strength to make wealth.”²³

Moreover, as long as Yaakov and his sons were alive, even in Egypt there was no possibility for Pharaoh’s decree to take effect. Since when they

¹⁸ *Eikev* 11:10.

¹⁹ Even before the Egyptian exile and the Exodus.

²⁰ *Devarim* 11:11.

²¹ *Taanis* 10a.

²² *Devarim* 8:17.

²³ *Devarim* 8:18.

were in Israel, they had seen **clearly** that everything depended on Hashem, even when they later came to {Egypt, which was} a place that seemed to be ruled by nature, their previous G-dly **vision** was neither forgotten, hidden nor concealed from them. {Therefore} this affected them so much that even in Egypt they realized (at least intellectually) that the strings of nature were pulled by Hashem.

[This is similar to the idea of a **miracle** {סג}, which {also} implies “raised,” because a miracle “lifts” (a person’s perspective of) nature. A miracle allows a person to realize that **nature** is also governed by Hashem.]

It was only after “Yosef, his brothers and that whole generation died,”²⁴ when no one who was in Israel remained alive, was there a complete “descent” into Egypt and into nature. Then, there was a possibility to decree: “throw them into the river.”

6.

MOSHE, THE FAITHFUL SHEPHERD

Moshe’s character²⁵ is expressed in his role as the savior of Israel, because he is the “faithful shepherd” who nurtures **faith** in Jews, in a way that affects their actual behavior. Even when there was no **obvious perception** of G-dliness, or understanding of Hashem, Moshe was able to bring about that **faith** in Hashem should **illuminate** the Jewish people. With this faith, they withstood the decree of Pharaoh.

Even though they had the power of faith beforehand, since Jews are naturally “believers, sons of believers,”²⁶ nevertheless, regular faith (in a peripheral way)²⁷ was not enough. In order for faith to impact the lives and

²⁴ *Shemos* 1:6.

²⁵ {In the original, “*inyan*.”}

²⁶ *Shabbos* 97b.

²⁷ {This natural faith that a Jew is born with, is called an “encompassing faith” because although it is real, it is not necessarily felt **within** the person’s heart and mind.}

the **behavior** of a person, the person must be “**shepherded** by faith,”²⁸ i.e., faith must be internalized. This was accomplished by Moshe, the **shepherd** of faith.²⁹

7.

SHEPHERD OF FAITH

Now we can understand why the verse points out that “Moshe shepherded the flock of **Yisro**, his father-in-law, the **priest of Midian**.”³⁰

It is clear why the Torah tells us that he was a shepherd, for as known,³¹ this was a preparation (and a test) for Moshe to become the **shepherd** of Israel. However, why is it important to emphasize that he was the shepherd of “**Yisro’s** flock,” and specifically {that Yisro was} the **priest of Midian**?

The deeper explanation: Within the “flock of Yisro” were embedded “forces of holiness,” and Moshe “drew them close to holiness.”³² The verse emphasizes “the flock of Yisro... the priest of Midian” because Moshe was able to draw “close to holiness” even those sparks that found themselves with the “priest of Midian” — a priest for **idolatry**, one who had worshiped every type of idol.³³

Therefore, this was the preparation for Moshe to become a shepherd of the Jews³⁴ in **Egypt**. Even though G-dliness was not visible to the Jews nor even comprehensible to them, as they perceived only a world of nature, Moshe was the shepherd of faith who inspired and instilled within them an internalized faith in Hashem.

²⁸ *Tehillim* 37:3; *Torah Or*, p. 111; *Likkutei Torah*, “*Devarim*,” p. 4b ff.

²⁹ See *Tanya*, beg. of ch. 42.

³⁰ *Shemos* 3:1.

³¹ *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Shemos*,” sec. 7; *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 2, sec. 2.

³² *Yalkut Reuveini*, commenting on *Bereishis* 31:9.

³³ Rashi’s commentary on *Shemos* 18:11.

³⁴ This fits with the teaching of the *Baal Shem Tov* (*Toldos Yaakov Yosef*, “*Lech Lecha*”; *Ben Poras Yosef*, end) that the souls of the Jews whom Moshe later gave the Torah and became his students, were previously incarnated in the flock of Yisro.

8.

CLEANSING THE NILE

This is the connection between the two ideas — nullifying the idolatry of the Nile and annulling the decree to “throw every boy born into the river” — because (on a deeper level) they are analogous. The decree to “throw them into **the river**” is connected with the fact that the river was the idolatry of Egypt. Moshe, “the faithful shepherd,” was born in Egypt and joined the Jews in the Egyptian exile, to the extent that he was placed into the hotbed of exile and slavery — the “river” {the idolatry of the Nile}. He thereby gave {the Jews} the power to fight the idolatry of the Nile, and automatically, the decree was abolished.

9.

RELEVANCE TO US

The idea of leaving Egypt is germane every single day. Therefore, it is understood that all the above general concepts — the visible G-dly experiences before the descent into Egypt, the descent into the Egyptian exile, and afterward, the exodus from Egypt — are {a metaphor} to be applied every single day in everyone’s service of Hashem.

Every day, the order of service is as follows: {First a person goes to} synagogue, from synagogue to the study hall,³⁵ and from the study hall to “conduct yourself in the ways of the world.”³⁶ First comes the divine service of prayer, then Torah study; and finally, matters of livelihood.

By serving {Hashem} with prayer, a Jew reveals G-dliness in his soul, to the extent of perceiving G-dliness. Following the preparations before prayer and the meditations in the verses of praise,³⁷ etc., we arrive at the recitation of the Shema. שמע is an acronym for “שאו מרום עיניכם (וראו),”³⁸ “Lift

³⁵ See the end of *Berachos*; Alter Rebbe's *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 155.

³⁶ *Berachos* 35b.

³⁷ {*Pesukei DeZimra*, the verses recited during the morning prayers between שאמר and ישתבח.}

³⁸ *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikun* 49.

your eyes (**and see**),”³⁹ {which implies that during the recitation of the Shema, one can experience} a revelation of G-dliness in the manner of seeing [like {they experienced in} the land of Israel — see above section 5]. After {the Shema} comes the *Amidah* {**standing**} prayer, when we are **like a servant** in front of his master,⁴⁰ standing with complete *bitul*,⁴¹ to the extent that the prayer is introduced with the petition:⁴² “**Hashem, open** my lips, and my mouth will (just) speak (and elicit) Your praise.”

After the service of prayer, the person “leaves” this level of “**seeing**” G-dliness in which he was completely *batel*. From this {level}, there are two “descents”:

- a. From synagogue to the study hall to learn Torah, which is (how Hashem’s wisdom is grasped) through the apprehension and comprehension of the **person**, commensurate with **his understanding**. This level of apprehension and comprehension is a decent compared with the experience of **seeing** G-dliness and being in a state of complete *bitul* during prayer. However {from his Torah study} he can discern the effect of his prayers, because the G-dliness revealed in his soul during prayer effectuates a proper understanding. [This parallels {the state of the Jewish people after} the descent into Egypt **during the lifetime** of Yaakov and his sons].
- b. When a Jew then attends to his business affairs, he can forget about Hashem due to the hiddenness and concealment {of G-dliness} in the natural order. In order to remember constantly that “it is He who gives you strength to make wealth,” and that all his business dealings should conform with Jewish law, as Hashem desires, a person must be imbued with a power of **faith in Hashem**, which he awakens and internalizes.

³⁹ *Yeshayahu* 40:26.

⁴⁰ *Tractate Shabbos* 10a.

⁴¹ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

⁴² {*Tehillim* 51:17.} See *Maamar Ad. Sefasai Tiftach* 5628, printed in *Sefer HaMamaarim* 5627, p. 436 ff. {and *mammar Ad. Sefasai Tiftach* 5712}.

10.

NO FEAR

This is the lesson in *avodas Hashem* that a Jew must glean from all of the above:

- a. He must realize that when he leaves his prayers, which afford the opportunity to behold G-dliness and to nullify oneself totally to Hashem, this is a spiritual descent. True, this slide is in accord with Jewish law, as discussed earlier concerning what *Shulchan Aruch* says, viz.,⁴³ “a person should conduct himself in the way of the land.” But he needs to do so because he is “forced by the word of Hashem”⁴⁴ (as our Sages said regarding the descent into Egypt itself): He complies only because he knows that this is the will of Hashem.
- b. On the other hand, he has no reason to be terrified by this descent. True, the decline is a profound one, because he can no longer behold G-dliness, and (during his work) he doesn’t even have an understanding or comprehension of G-dliness {which he had while learning Torah} (since while working, he needs to focus on the tasks at hand). Nevertheless, by arousing the level of Moshe within his soul,⁴⁵ he reveals his faith in Hashem in a manner of “**shepherding** faith.” This frees him from his personal exile to the extent that in all aspects of his life, he can constantly see that the eyes of Hashem your L-rd {are on him} from the beginning of the year until the end of the year — {because he will see} Divine Providence in his business affairs.

From one redemption to another {a person’s own redemption will lead} to the global redemption through our righteous Moshiach,⁴⁶ who will lead us to our holy land, very soon.

Based on talks delivered on Shabbos *parshas Shemos*, 5722 & 5723 (1961 & 1963)

⁴³ {See *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 156.}

⁴⁴ Pesach Haggadah.

⁴⁵ See *Tanya*, beg. ch. 42.

⁴⁶ Note that our Sages say that **Moshe** is the first redeemer and the last redeemer. (See *Shemos Rabbah*, ch. 2, sec. 4; *Zohar*, vol. 1, p. 253a; *Shaar Ha’pesukim*, “*Vayechi*”; *Torah Or*, beg. of *parshas Mishpatim*.)