



**MOSES AND THE WORLD**

**T**HE TORAH READINGS AT THIS TIME OF YEAR FOCUS OUR ATTENTION ON the figure of Moses. In last week's Sedra (Shemot) he was born, in our Sedra he sets in motion the series of Ten Plagues which will lead to the Jewish people going free from Egypt in next week's Sedra. In the following weeks will come the Splitting of the Sea and the Giving of the Torah, in each of which Moses is central.

Moses is famous as redeemer, bringing the Jewish people to freedom, and also as lawgiver and teacher, the great leader who communicated directly with G-d, and then transmitted what he learned to the Jewish people and the world.

An interesting vignette from the Midrash illustrates the particular aspect of his character which secured him the special role of leading the Jewish people out of Egypt. Moses was a shepherd in the desert area of Sinai. A small lamb strayed from the flock and ran away in search of water. Moses, without hesitation, sped a great distance to retrieve it, and made sure its needs were supplied, carrying the lamb on his shoulders. This was typical of his individual concern for each and every member of his flock.

**Celebrating the Bar Mitzva of Mendel Brackman שי'**  
**26 Tevet 5776 - Mazaltov!**  
**Dedicated by his Grandparents שי'**

Moses combined two extremes - the highest reaching for spirituality and closeness with G-d, and also love, concern, and attention to detail at the most simple level of the physical world.

The Torah represents the loftiest of ideals - G-d's teachings. Moses' role is to transmit the Torah to the Jewish people and also to the world. In a sense, this task is a 'descent', possibly into the remotest of spots on the earth's surface, like following the lost lamb. For this is the true nature of Torah, and the role of the Jewish people.

This helps us understand something about every Jew. The special quality of the Jew ('chosenness') is not intended as selfish elitism. The Jews are chosen in order that their souls, connecting with G-d, will be able to create a dwelling for the Divine in the real world. The 613 commandments apply specifically to the Jew, while the Seven Noachide Laws, basic laws of morality and recognition of G-d, apply to all humanity. Maimonides says the Jewish people have the responsibility to teach these ideals to all humanity. In addition, just by existing in the physical world, the Jew expresses holiness.

The sacred Zohar states that the spiritual power of Moses spreads through all generations. One meaning of this is that there are great leaders who have the responsibility to give guidance to the Jewish people so that they can serve G-d with all their heart and soul. These leaders have the quality of "Moses" for their generation.

A further meaning is that there is a 'Moses' hidden in each of us. This is our inner power of recognition of the Divine. Our task in life is to arouse this Moses within. Through Torah study, prayer, and Mitzvot, we reach towards a certain sense of connection with G-d, sometimes even a moment of inspiration.

Like Moses we seek to bring this radiance to the world around us; to express it in every aspect of our lives, communicating with our own more earthly selves and also with other people, caring for everyone, with love. Through this we help bring about the redeeming power of Moses, transforming the world, bringing us and all humanity from spiritual slavery to freedom, from Egypt to the Promised Land.

1. Exodus 6:2-9:35. 2. Shemot Rabbah 2:2. 3. See Rabbi Shneur Zalman's *Tanya* ch.42.

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*SEDRA VA'ERA*

***ESCAPE FROM EGYPT!***

Benjy could feel himself getting angry. It was the third time this Monopoly game that David had cheated. He was doing it on purpose! Benjy felt the rage grow inside him, and explode.

“That’s it, I told you before! Those dice added up to nine, not eight! You should have landed on Fleet Street, on my hotel, but you cheated as usual, just because you’re scared of losing!”

He threw his street cards onto the board, upsetting the pieces. Getting up, he stalked out of the room.

Rachel and David gazed after him in amazement. “Benjy, I didn’t do that on purpose, I’m just not so good at adding, you know that,” David pleaded. But his older brother ignored him.

Stalking into the kitchen, he went to get himself some orange squash. By the time he finished, he had already calmed down. Rachel came into the kitchen.

“Benjy, now David’s very upset. Why did you do that? He didn’t mean to cheat.”

Benjy reddened. “I don’t know, I just have such a bad temper. I just can’t help it. I know I’m getting angry, and that I shouldn’t, but there’s nothing I can do, and then I say things that I regret later.”

As he said this, he suddenly remembered what he had been taught in school that day. They had been learning about the plagues that G-d brought upon the Egyptians because Pharaoh would not let the Jewish people leave.

Their teacher told them that we are supposed to re-live the going out of Egypt as if we were there ourselves. "How is that possible?" one boy had asked, "It all happened so long ago!"

"Well, that's why we're studying this topic now," their teacher explained. "For example, do you know we are in Egypt now?" The class looked a bit blank. Wasn't Egypt a long way away?

"Look at the Hebrew word for Egypt, *Mitzraim*" The teacher wrote it on the board. "If you read it a different way, can also be read as *Meytzarim*, meaning boundaries, or limitations."

The teacher gazed round the class. Robert at the back in the corner was looking out of the window. Simon, captain of the house cricket team, seemed to be writing something, probably cricket scores. The teacher sighed. A few pupils *did* seem to be listening. Then he went on.

"We all have limitations - we might be lazy by nature, or very shy, or lose our temper easily, but we must work to get out of these limitations, in order to have our own personal going out of Egypt. It might not be easy - but nor was getting out of Egypt."

Now, remembering this, Benjy realized what his limitation was. The teacher had said it - losing his temper! Could he really get beyond this limitation? Benjy frowned, and then he smiled. It might not be easy to control his temper, but it *could* be done. He would escape from the limitation of his temper, his own Egypt - and Pharaoh wouldn't be able to catch him.

Then he would be free...!

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