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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

Imposter?

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should take the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt?” (3:11)

Everyone deserves to feel confident in who they are, because the fact that you exist testifies to the fact that Hashem created you, and that creation comes from love. If you don't love yourself, Hashem certainly does, or why would he have created you?

But if you've ever questioned your success or found it hard to let go of your mistakes, you're not alone.

An estimated 82% of people struggle with imposter syndrome, and 85% have low self-esteem. Imposter syndrome is the feeling that you're a fraud and don't deserve the things you've achieved. Low self-esteem is a negative self-perception that makes you judge yourself harshly.

While these two conditions have a lot of similarities, they're not identical.

The term “imposter syndrome” comes from the term “imposter phenomenon,” which originated with psychologists Pauline Rose Clance and Suzanne Imes in 1978. Clance and Imes used the term to describe high-achieving women who felt fraudulent or inadequate like they had fooled people into believing they were successful.

Nowadays, imposter syndrome is used to describe consistent feelings of self-doubt, even in areas where you've performed well. A few common signs of imposter syndrome are:

Doubting your competence and skills

Negative self-talk

Getting upset when you fail to meet challenging goals

Overachieving or over-preparing

Sabotaging your own hard work

Attributing your success to something other than yourself

If you have imposter syndrome, you might feel like a fraud or tell yourself you don't deserve the things you've achieved. Imposter syndrome can create anxiety that other people will find out you're a fake and that you'll fail to live up to expectations.

Low self-esteem means you judge yourself harshly, think negative thoughts about yourself, and focus more on your flaws than your successes. Unlike imposter syndrome, low self-esteem usually does not make you feel like a fraud, but you may still live in fear of failing or letting others down.

Some signs of low self-esteem include:

Lack of confidence

Thinking or saying negative things about yourself

Ignoring your achievements in favor of focusing on your failures

Sensitivity to criticism

Withdrawing from social activities

Sometimes, low self-esteem can cause or worsen mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

Imposter syndrome and low self-esteem share similar signs, and the conditions can overlap. Having low self-esteem may make you more likely to experience imposter syndrome. Sometimes, having imposter syndrome and the anxiety that comes with it can lower your self-esteem.

A person with imposter syndrome has generally achieved some level of success in an area of their life, yet they struggle to attribute that success to their own ability.

A person with low self-confidence, on the other hand, may be too worried about failing to start working toward their goals in the first place. Low self-confidence generally impacts multiple areas of your life, while imposter syndrome is often limited to specific areas.

“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and that I should take the Children of Yisrael out of Egypt?”

Hashem answered Moshe's two questions in order. *“Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?”* said Moshe. Hashem told him that he need not fear Pharaoh, because He would be with him. And, as for the merit of the Jewish People, Hashem replied they are destined to receive the Torah on Mount Sinai. They deserved redemption on the basis of their future loyalty to Hashem. This teaches us that we can be judged and even rewarded on the basis of our potential alone.

The fact that Jewish People would, in the future, listen to and obey Hashem, was sufficient to merit their redemption.

If Hashem rewards us even for our future achievements, how much more should we not denigrate our past achievements and think we are in some way imposters.

Q & A

Questions

1. Why does the verse say "And Yosef was in Egypt"?
2. "...And they will go up out of the land." Who said this and what did he mean?
3. Why did Pharaoh specifically choose water as the means of killing the Jewish boys? (Two reasons.)
4. "She saw that he was good." What did she see "good" about Moshe that was unique?
5. Which Hebrew men were fighting each other?
6. Moshe was afraid that the Jewish People were not fit to be redeemed, because some among them committed a certain sin. What sin?
7. Why did the Midianites drive Yitro's daughters away from the well?
8. How did Yitro know that Moshe was Yaakov's descendant?
9. What lesson was Moshe to learn from the fact that the burning bush was not consumed?
10. What merit did the Jewish People have that warranted G-d's promise to redeem them?
11. Which expression of redemption would assure the people that Moshe was the true redeemer?
12. What did the staff turning into a snake symbolize?
13. Why didn't Moshe want to be the leader?
14. "And Hashem was angry with Moshe..." What did Moshe lose as a result of this anger?
15. What was special about Moshe's donkey?
16. About which plague was Pharaoh warned first?
17. Why didn't the elders accompany Moshe and Aharon to Pharaoh? How were they punished?
18. Which tribe did not work as slaves?
19. Who were the: a) *nogsim* b) *shotrim*?
20. How were the *shotrim* rewarded for accepting the beatings on behalf of their fellow Jews?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 1:5 - This verse adds that despite being in Egypt as a ruler, Yosef maintained his righteousness.
2. 1:10 - Pharaoh said it, meaning that the Egyptians would be forced to leave Egypt.
3. 1:10,22 - He hoped to escape Divine retribution, as G-d promised never to flood the entire world. Also, his astrologers saw that the Jewish redeemer's downfall would be through water.
4. 2:2 - When he was born, the house was filled with light.
5. 2:13 - Datan and Aviram.
6. 2:14 - *Lashon hara* (evil speech).
7. 2:17 - Because a ban had been placed on Yitro for abandoning idol worship.
8. 2:20 - The well water rose towards Moshe.
9. 3:12 - Just as the bush was not consumed, so too Moshe would be protected by G-d.
10. 3:12 - That they were destined to receive the Torah
11. 3:16,18 - "I surely remembered (*pakod pakadeti*)."
12. 4:3 - It symbolized that Moshe spoke ill of the Jews by saying that they wouldn't listen to him, just as the original snake sinned through speech.
13. 4:10 - He didn't want to take a position above that of his older brother, Aharon.
14. 4:14 - Moshe lost the privilege of being a *kohen*.
15. 4:20 It was used by Avraham for *akeidat Yitzchak* and will be used in the future by *mashiach*.
16. 4:23 - Death of the firstborn.
17. 5:1 - The elders were accompanying Moshe and Aharon, but they were afraid and one by one they slipped away. Hence, at the giving of the Torah, the elders weren't allowed to ascend with Moshe.
18. 5:5 - The tribe of Levi.
19. 5:6 - a) Egyptian taskmasters; b) Jewish officers.
20. 5:14 - They were chosen to be on the Sanhedrin.

WHAT'S IN A WORD?

Synonyms in the Hebrew Language

by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

Pulling My Weight

Many commentators who discussed Moses' name have asked the following question: Why is he called Moshe, which means "the who is pulling/drawing," rather than *Mashui*, which would mean "he who was pulled (out of the water)"? Wasn't Moses the one "who was pulled out" (passive), not the one "who is pulling" (active)?

Rabbi Shlomo Ibn Parchon (an early grammarian from the 12th century) raises this question, asserting that Moses should have been called *Mashui*, with the one who performed the act of saving (i.e., Pharaoh's daughter) being referred to as Moshe. However, Ibn Parchon does not explain why it was that Moses was ultimately named Moshe and not *Mashui*.

In line with what we've seen so far, Rabbi Moshe Alshich suggests that in naming him Moshe, the Pharaoh's daughter meant to express how Moses possessed a magnetic charm that compelled her to leave the palace and specifically bathe in the river (see Ibn Ezra there), as though *he* pulled *her* towards the river. Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Ehrenreich (1863-1944) suggests that the name Moshe relates to Moses' power to draw the people of Israel to follow him, akin to a "magnetic personality," or because he pulled the Israelites out of the impurities of Egypt by bringing them closer to Hashem. Fascinatingly, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Kasher (1895-1983) in *Torah Shleimah* cites an unpublished Medieval manuscript that suggests that Hashem orchestrated her naming him Moshe because that name is the word Hashem spelled backwards.

Peirush HaTur offers a more prosaic explanation in the name Rabbi Yosef Kimchi: Pharaoh's daughter simply was not fluent enough in Hebrew grammar to differentiate between *poel* (Moshe) and *pual* (*Mashui*), which is why she gave him a grammatically-inappropriate name. But Rabbi Kimchi adds that there was also an element of Divine providence in this unusual naming convention, because the name Moshe also hints at Moses' future role at "pulling out" the Jewish People from their exile in Egypt.

Other early commentators see the name Moshe as alluding to his future role in leading the Jews. More specifically, *Peirush HaRokeach* suggests that Moses was named Moshe because he was destined to pull the Jewish People out of the water at the Splitting of the Sea. Similarly, the Tosafists claim that he was called Moshe because the Pharaoh's daughter prophesied about his role in drawing water from the rock for the Israelites in the wilderness. *Midrash HaGadol* posits that Moshe signifies the idea that Moses pulled himself out of the waters, as it was his future merits that caused Pharaoh's daughter to save him.

Going in a slightly different direction, Chizkuni implies that by giving him the name Moshe, Pharaoh's daughter prayed for Moses to grow up to be the one who liberates the Jewish people from their bondage, akin to how she rescued him from the water. A similar idea is advanced by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who explains that she called him Moshe, instead of *Mashui*, for a pedagogical purpose: she wanted to raise the child to be ever-cognizant of the fact that his own life depended on the salvatory actions of the one who extracted him from the water, so that he too will act in a salvatory way to save others who are oppressed. She wanted him to have the courage to save others in their times of needs and extract them from their dreadful situations, just like *she* saved *him* as a baby. The constant awareness that his life depended on someone saving him from water was meant to motivate him to do the same by saving others from their distressing situations. Ultimately, the name Moshe encompasses various interpretations, reflecting his destiny to lead, save and liberate the Jewish People from adversity.

*For more about the Pharaoh's daughter naming Moshe, and various theories about what Moshe's original Egyptian name might have been (Tomer, Mosh, Monius), check out my book [Lashon HaKodesh: History, Holiness, & Hebrew](#), published by Mosaica Press. My book is available online through Amazon and Feldheim and at local Jewish bookstores.

*To read more about how the rare Hebrew verb *moshe* differs from the verbs *moshech* and *shoev*, check out the full version of this article: https://ohr.edu/this_week/whats_in_a_word/

TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Bava Kama 65-71

A Sin Takes Root

Rabbi Akiva said, “Why does the Torah state that if a person (steals an ox or sheep and then) slaughters it or sells it he must pay the owner four or five times its value? Because the person became ‘rooted’ in sin.”

As Rava said, “Because he ‘repeated’ the sin.”

These two statements are taught with regards to the question of whether a thief becomes the owner of a stolen item if the victim gives up hope (*yi'ush*) of recovering it. The *gemara* records the both Rabbi Akiva's and Rava's insights into the reason for the special penalty paid for stealing and then slaughtering or selling an ox or sheep, as taught in the Torah (Ex. 21:37) and the Mishna (62b).

Rabbi Akiva's reason is: “Because the thief *became rooted* in sin.” The *gemara* understands this to mean that his subsequent act of slaughter or sale “took roots, i.e. he ‘became strengthened in sin’ since his action *accomplished* something” (Rashi).

The *gemara* questions this reason: If the penalty is for what the thief did before *yi'ush*, how can Rabbi Akiva say that his action “did something”? If he *sold* it before *yi'ush*, the sale is not valid! Rather, the *gemara* suggests, he is penalized for his action after *yi'ush*. But, if this is the case, asks the *gemara*, he should not have to pay any penalty, since he is slaughtering or selling *his own item*! Therefore, the *gemara* offers the reason that Rava states: “Because he *repeated* the sin.” And the penalty is imposed only when the thief repeated the sin before *yi'ush*, while the item still belonged to the victim of the theft.

But what about Rabbi Akiva's reason, and how we originally understood it? Even after this apparent conclusion, it is still possible to accept the reason for the penalty as being that the thief's second action “took root” and accomplished a real change. This can be so if Rabbi Akiva holds that *yi'ush* by itself does not result in a valid sale by the thief, but rather that the combination of *yi'ush* and change of domain (to the seller) effects a valid sale, just as slaughter effects a true change to the item. In both cases his “deed was effective.”

▪ *Bava Kama 67b, 68a*

COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

BIRKAT HAMAZON (PART 7)

BLUEPRINT OF JEWISH DESTINY

“Anyone who recites Birkat HaMazon is blessed through it.”
(Zohar HaKadosh to Parshat Terumah)

Birkat HaMazon continues: “For all, Hashem, our G-d, we thank You and bless You. May Your Name be blessed by the mouth of all living beings, continuously, for all eternity.”

Our blessing is teaching us the obligation to give thanks. Not just to thank Hashem for what we have eaten, but to thank him “for all,” for everything. Without Hashem’s blessings we cannot exist. The first person in the Torah to put into words this sense of immeasurable gratitude was Yaakov’s wife, Leah. The Torah states (Bereshit 29:35), “[Leah] conceived again, and bore a son and declared, ‘This time let me gratefully praise Hashem.’ Therefore, she called his name Yehuda.” The etymology of the word “Jew” meanders through Old French and Latin and Greek, until it finally reaches its original Hebrew “Yehudi,” which comes from the name given to Yaakov’s fourth son, Yehuda, which means to give thanks.

The Chidushei HaRim writes that the Jewish nation is named after Yehuda because it is a fundamental Jewish characteristic to always be thankful to Hashem for having given us so much more than we deserve.

The legendary Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshiva in Belarus, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz (1873-1936), explains the significance of Leah naming her son Yehuda. He says that under normal circumstances, when we thank someone for what they have done for us, we do so to remove the debt of gratitude we have towards them. Our giving thanks is actually self-serving, as it takes away our obligation to be beholden to the person. Leah’s motivation, however, was the exact opposite. She wanted to make a lasting impression, one that would remind her of her obligation to always need to feel thankful to Hashem. Therefore, she chose to name her son “Yehuda” as a constant reminder of her immeasurable sense of gratitude to Hashem.

And, not only to Hashem, but we must likewise show our thanks to all who assist us in any way. When the city of Kovna, Lithuania, was under Russian rule, conscription into the Russian army was a nightmare scenario for every Jewish family. Being drafted into the army meant being in constant fear for one’s physical life. Even worse, it meant almost certain death to one’s soul. A young man drafted into the army was not able to keep Shabbat, eat kosher, or really do anything else that would keep him spiritually alive. By the time he would be released from the army, his Jewish identity would be a dim memory at best.

Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor (1817-1896), the venerated Rabbi of Kovno and one of the most authoritative experts in Jewish Law in Eastern Europe, had a beloved student named Yaakov who was at great risk of being drafted. His name had come before the army’s draft board and it was only a matter of time before his fate would be decided. Of course, Yaakov and his family and friends poured out their hearts to Hashem, with prayer that he would be rejected for any reason by the army.

One day, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan sat together with two other Rabbis to preside over a complicated court case. Suddenly, they heard a knock and the door opened. “Rebbe, Rebbe!” cried one of the students. “Did Rebbe hear the good news? Yaakov was exempted from the draft!”

“Mazal tov!” everyone shouted in unison. Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan was overcome with emotion. He thanked the student for the good news, and showered him with blessings. The student left, and they resumed the court case. A few moments later, there was another knock on the door. Another student entered. Not realizing that Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan had already heard the news, he excitedly told him that Yaakov had been exempted. Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan, not showing any indication that he already knew, cried out “Mazal tov!” again. He then showered that student with blessings, just like the first one, and then returned to the case he was adjudicating. This scene repeated itself over and over again six times! And each time, Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan showed the same enthusiastic appreciation and the same heartfelt joy. Because he did not want to deprive even one student of the good feeling that it *he* was the one who brought the good news to his Rebbe.

To be continued...

PARSHA OVERVIEW

With the death of Yosef, the Book of Bereishet (Genesis) comes to an end. The Book of Shemot (Exodus) chronicles the creation of the nation of Israel from the descendants of Yaakov. At the beginning of this week's Torah portion, Pharaoh, fearing the population explosion of Jews, enslaves them. However, when their birthrate increases, he orders the Jewish midwives to kill all newborn males.

Yocheved gives birth to Moshe and hides him in the reeds by the Nile. Pharaoh's daughter finds and adopts him, although she knows he is probably a Hebrew. Miriam, Moshe's sister, offers to find a nursemaid for Moshe and arranges for his mother Yocheved to be his nursemaid.

Years later, Moshe witnesses an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and Moshe kills the Egyptian. Realizing his life is in danger, Moshe flees to Midian where he rescues Tziporah, whose father Yitro approves their subsequent marriage. On Chorev (Mount Sinai), Moshe witnesses the burning bush where G-d commands him to lead the Jewish People from Egypt to Eretz Yisrael, the Land promised to their ancestors.

Moshe protests that the Jewish People will doubt his being G-d's agent, so G-d enables Moshe to perform three miraculous transformations to validate himself in the people's eyes: transforming his staff into a snake, his healthy hand into a leprous one, and water into blood. When Moshe declares that he is not a good public speaker, G-d tells him that his brother Aharon will be his spokesman. Aharon greets Moshe on his return to Egypt and they petition Pharaoh to release the Jews. Pharaoh responds with even harsher decrees, declaring that the Jews must produce the same quota of bricks as before but without being given supplies. The people become dispirited, but G-d assures Moshe that He will force Pharaoh to let the Jews go.

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TAAMEI HAMITZVOS

Reasons behind the Mitzvos

By Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

“Study improves the quality of the act and completes it, and a mitzvah is more beautiful when it emerges from someone who understands its significance” (Meiri, Bava Kama 17a).

CIRCUMCISION

(Mitzvah #2 in Sefer HaChinuch)

Hashem told Avraham: “This is the covenant that you shall keep between Me and you, along with your descendants after you: circumcise all males.” (Bereishis 17:10)

REASON ONE: SYMBOL OF DISTINCTION

Hashem sealed His covenant with His nation by making them physically distinct from other nations for all generations, and the reproductive organ is the part of the body that symbolizes the covenant’s continuity (Sefer HaChinuch). It is a permanent sign on the flesh that can never wear away (Rabbeinu Bachayei, Bereishis 17:13), and it functions like a slave’s seal that signifies his allegiance to his master and reminds him to dedicate himself to his service (Seforno to Bereishis 17:11). In contrast, idol-worshippers used to tattoo themselves with symbols of their gods (Kad HaKemach, Milah). The circumcision also serves to prevent gentiles from claiming to be Jewish, for it is very difficult for someone to inflict such an injury upon himself or his sons unless he is in truth Jewish (Moreh Nevuchim 3:49).

REASON TWO: SYMBOL OF MAN’S PURPOSE

Hashem desired that His chosen should attain spiritual perfection, and He wanted them to do so themselves so that they would thereby merit a perfect eternal reward. He therefore created the males uncircumcised and commanded them to circumcise themselves, alluding to each Jew that just as he is capable of perfecting his body, he is capable of perfecting his conduct (Sefer HaChinuch).

REASON THREE: TITHE OF THE BODY

We are commanded to separate the foreskin similar to the way we are commanded to tithe our produce and income (Devarim Rabbah 3:5) [in order to demonstrate that He is our master]. Circumcision is similar to an offering, and that is why it involves the removal of blood and is celebrated with a festive meal (see Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer §19). It is greater than an animal offering because it is brought from a person’s very body (Rabbeinu Bachayei, Bereishis 17:13).

REASON FOUR: REMINDER AGAINST IMMORALITY

Hashem designated the reproductive organ as the place of this covenant so that it should serve as a reminder for man to refrain from immoral acts (*Yalkut Shimoni, Neviim §42*). In addition, circumcision weakens the organ in a manner that deters immorality without damaging its function (*Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim 3:49*).

REASON FIVE: REMOVAL OF SPIRITUAL BLOCKAGE

The foreskin is the worst impurity and blemish (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*). By removing the physical blockage of the foreskin, called “*orlah*,” we effect the removal of spiritual blockage the covers over the heart, ears, and lips (*Menoras Ha'Meor, Ner 5 2:2:2*). The circumcision purifies us from the contamination that we contracted through Adam's sin (*Alshich Bereishis 17:1-2*). Circumcision is a necessary preparation before a man can study the Torah (*Tanchuma, Mishpatim §5*).

REASONS WHY IT IS PERFORMED ON THE EIGHTH DAY: Hashem commanded us to circumcise our sons soon after they are born before their intellects develop significantly so that pain will be only physical and therefore minimal. Moreover, once the child grows up, he may refuse to perform it. In addition, it is performed before the parents develop a love for the infant so that it will not be difficult for them either (*Moreh Nevuchim* *ibid.*). Hashem said to do so on the eighth day so that the child will be strong enough to undergo the procedure healthily (*Devarim Rabbah 6:1*). This is because the body's clotting agents need a week to develop; in fact, they reach their lifetime peak of 110% their normal function on precisely the eighth day (*Otzar HaYahadut* Vol. 1 p. 405). According to the aforementioned Midrash that compares circumcision to an offering, it can only be performed from the eighth day onward in the same way an animal may only be offered from that time (*Rabbeinu Bachayei* *ibid.*). Circumcision is performed on the eighth day because it elevates the Jew beyond the limits of the natural world that was created in seven days (*Shem MiShmuel, Zos Chanukah 5681*). [This summary was formed based on commentaries culled in *Alaktah Ba'Amarim (Bris Milah)*, by *Rabbi Ori Ben-Dov*, with the author's permission.]

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