

THE NAGEL EDITION

חומש קורן לב לדעת

THE KOREN LEV LADAAT HUMASH

ספר שמות

SHEMOT/EXODUS



KOREN

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TORAH TRANSLATION BY

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THE NAGEL EDITION
OF THE KOREN YOUNG ADULT HUMASH LEV LADAAT
IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

Jack M. Nagel ז"ו

ר' יעקב אלימלך ז"ל

A beloved husband, devoted father, adoring grandfather and great grandfather.

A true Visionary, who survived the Shoah, and whose philosophy was
to deal compassionately and kindly with all people.

His love for Torah and being a mensch guided him throughout his life.

He believed Education was the key to Jewish survival, and he made it his life's mission
to enrich the Los Angeles community with all aspects of Jewish scholarship and culture.

He established and remained committed to many yeshivot and Centers of Jewish
Learning throughout the United States and in his cherished homeland, Israel.

He had great faith, great heart, and great courage and was blessed
together with his Eshet Chayil, our Mother Gitta,
to leave a legacy of Tzedaka, Chesed and Emunah.

מרבח תורה מרבח חיים. מרבח צדקה מרבח שלום.

***"The more Torah, the more life. The more charity, the more peace."* (Avot 2:8)**

Dedicated with love by his children:

Dr. Ronnie and Cheryl Nagel

Los Angeles, California, USA

Esther and Dr. Paul Lerer

Englewood, New Jersey, USA

David and Marnie Nagel

Los Angeles, California, USA

Careena and Drew Parker

Englewood, New Jersey, USA

And his devoted wife, Dr. Gitta Nagel

Los Angeles, California, USA



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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

“דור לדור ישבח מעשיך” (תהלים קמה, ד)

“One generation will praise Your works to the next...” (Psalms 145:4)

It is with gratitude and a certain ambition that we introduce this volume of **THE NAGEL EDITION OF THE KOREN LEV LADAAT HUMASH**, a *Humash* designed to encourage connection, reflection and learning of our foundation stone, the Torah.

The connection between Jewish young adults and the Torah is critical. Our children must learn the text of the *Humash* and the classical commentators who have illuminated difficult passages. But it is just as important – and all-too-often neglected – that the student or young adult engage emotionally and experientially with the text. How does the Torah give them a prism to view the world around them? The need for this deeper, spiritual interaction gives rise to the name of this edition: **Lev Ladaat: The Understanding Heart**. For our ambition is that every Jew engage with the Torah and incorporate its values into his or her daily life, not just as an academic exercise.

It is with this ambition that Koren Publishers Jerusalem has created this edition, designed for high school students and young adults in synagogue *minyanim*. Since 1962, the Koren Tanakh has been recognized for its textual accuracy and innovative graphic design. We have remained committed to these qualities, and we have recently had the privilege of enriching the *Humash* text with the eloquent English translation of one of the most articulate and original Jewish thinkers of our time, Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, שליט"א.

It is with gratitude that we acknowledge Rabbi Sacks for this exceptional translation of the Torah. And our

thanks are no less due to Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn, from whose fertile imagination and broad educational experience the concept for this Young Adult *Humash* sprang. Likewise to Rabbi Dr. Zvi Grumet, whose intimate knowledge of the *Humash* and its commentaries has enriched these pages inestimably. And to Rabbi Yedidya Naveh, our Managing Editor, who brought it all together into a handsome and useful edition.

None of this would have been possible without the support and detailed involvement of the Nagel Family of California and New Jersey, who understood both the ambitions and methods of this edition. **THE NAGEL EDITION OF THE KOREN LEV LADAAT HUMASH** is dedicated to the memory of Jack Nagel, ז"ל, who was an exceptional community leader. He and his beloved wife Gitta have enabled so much of Jewish life in the Los Angeles community, especially in the area of Jewish education: *yeshivot*, high schools and so much more. Surviving the Holocaust and making a new life for himself and family, Jack's was an exemplary Jewish life, combining *Torah im derekh erez*. Koren is honored to be associated with his memory.

On behalf of all our *rabbanim*, scholars and designers, we thank the Nagel Family. And to the many thousands of readers, in this and future generations: We are forever in your debt.

We hope the use of this *Humash* will bring Jews closer and closer to the Torah and all the good it represents.

Matthew Miller, Publisher
Jerusalem, Autumn 5781 (2020)

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

What if there were no more bookstores left on Earth? What if we woke up to discover that the written word had been almost eliminated? This is the frightening possibility we confront when we visit “The Last Bookstore” in downtown Los Angeles. The Last Bookstore takes the guise of a survival shelter where all of Earth’s great books are sold, in case there may one day be no other places to find books. I once had the opportunity to spend some time there, and I found my way to a Bible, which included a commentary for teenagers. It roused my curiosity – why is there no edition of the *Ḥumash* directed toward young adults? Ought we be simply waiting for young Jewish people to come to the Torah, instead of bringing the Torah to them?

Some might say that teens aren’t interested in the *Ḥumash*. They are mistaken. For 22 years I have been teaching young adults, and I have always found them to be as hungry for knowledge and connection as any other group. Whenever I look past a student’s distracted veneer and genuinely engage them with some profound thought, it opens a reservoir of dialogue that I could not have found elsewhere.

With social media and technology becoming a constant part of our lives, our need for real and deep connection has only grown stronger. The Torah, we know, is an עץ חיים למחוקים בה – a tree of life for all who hold on to it.

Putting together a project like this *Ḥumash* is complex. It’s very easy to slip into anachronistic concepts aimed at grabbing attention. But we owe more to ourselves; we are hungry for substantive and truly thought-provoking conversations.

To you, our young adults, we now offer this *Ḥumash*. Will you use it? Will you allow it to guide you? When you are having a hard day and the walls seem to close in on you, will you pick this Torah up and let it lift you up? Will you let God into your life? We find Him in these words.

Why do we study Torah?

- *The Torah is a blueprint of the universe*, starting at the beginning – Bereshit. The Midrash teaches that God “looked into the Torah and created a world.” Do we want

to understand the world? “We should look at where it came from.”

- *How to practice Judaism*. Torah teaches us how to live as Jews. It teaches us how to practice our Judaism. The Gemara teaches: “תלמוד גדול, שהתלמוד מביא לידי מעשה” – learning is great in that it moves us to action. I love the word *halakha*, which denotes Jewish Law. It means to walk. We can’t walk in the ways of Judaism unless we know the *halakha*.
- *The values of Judaism*. The Torah guides us not only in how to practice Judaism’s laws but, at times more importantly, how to live its values. The emphasis that our people places on charity, education, visiting the sick – it’s all derived from the sensibilities of the Torah.
- *To help us do battle*. The sages interpret the wars described in the Torah as symbolic of our struggle against the *yetzer hara*, our evil inclination. Our shadow side is cunning. We have only one weapon against it, says the Gemara in Kiddushin: Torah study.
- *It is our oxygen, our life force*. The Gemara in Berakhot teaches us that just as a fish cannot live without water, so too we cannot exist without Torah. There isn’t an example of a Jewish community that has thrived and flourished over multiple generations without a love and appreciation for producing Torah.
- *Crisis management*. Think about what enabled Yosef to survive trauma after trauma in Egypt? What made him so resilient? What did Yosef have that allowed him to survive? Rashi tells us that before he was thrown into the pit, Yosef would spend his time with Yaakov, studying the Torah taught by Shem and Ever. Shem and Ever were survivors. They had endured the flood and the generation of the dispersion. Deep down, Yaakov knew that Yosef would need this Torah.
- *To develop a relationship with God*. Part of our mission in this world is to cleave to the Almighty. Through a relationship with God one learns what it means to be a proper human being. We enter into a relationship with our Father in Heaven by learning His word.

- *It's the Great Equalizer.* Rav Boruch Ber, the great rosh yeshiva, is quoted to have once said that Torah is the great equalizer. A child starting sixth grade could learn Bava Metzia, as though it's the most basic and simple piece of the Gemara. But at the same time, it's one of the hardest parts of the Talmud, challenging even the most advanced scholars. Torah is accessible to everyone at all levels.
- *It's your story.* Project years ahead and imagine bringing your spouse back to the house of your parents. While you're cleaning up the house, you find your old yearbook. You can't wait to share it with the person that you love. Why are you so excited? Because you are going to share the story of your life. That's why we open up the Torah. Our entire legacy is there; where we came from, what we went through, where our customs come from, and where our identity has come from.
- *And finally: It's your way out.* Imagine you are lost in a maze. You cannot find the way out. Suddenly, you're told by the maze keeper, who stands above the maze, that there is one way out. It's the simplest way of all – the way that you came in. Retrace your steps, and that's how you'll find a way out. The Jews have survived the Shoah and have rebuilt a remarkable edifice called the State of Israel. We have done amazing things in America and around the world. We have built *yeshivot* filled to the brim with students. But we also find ourselves at a crossroads, facing multiple challenges. God's guidance for us is: Retrace your steps. Figure out where you became lost, because that will tell us how to get through the maze of life. That's why we need the Torah.

With all these ideas in mind, we have designed this *Humash* in such a way as to maximize the student's opportunity for reflection, connection, and learning. In addition to Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks's beautiful new translation of the Torah, we have included several different commentaries to add meaning to your journey:

WISDOM OF THE HEART: This commentary is designed to make you think critically about the stories, laws, and poetry in the Torah and how they relate to your life. It often includes a question about your own experiences and opinions.

THE CLASSIC COMMENTATORS: This section begins with a guiding issue or question and brings two or three classic commentaries from Jewish history who have offered answers. Compare the answers given by the different commentaries. With whom do you agree? These are followed by *Questions for Thought*, which push you to read the commentaries more closely and find hidden ideas below the surface.

TEXTUAL SKILLS: These questions encourage you to read the text of the Torah more closely. The exact words and phrases appear carry tremendous meaning, and by paying attention to details we can make ourselves better readers.

QUICK BITES: This section provides a brief thought about the Torah that we can take with us out of the classroom and share with family and friends. It can be a jumping-off point for a deeper conversation.

EXPLORING HASHKAFAT: This essay at the end of most *parashot* deals with a "big idea" that challenges us as Jews in the modern world. It is not meant to give us easy answers, but to help us learn to think in creative ways about complex questions.

I write these words with profound gratitude to God. It is my hope that this project brings about a deeper love and understanding of God among the Jewish people.

It is an honor to work on this project together with Koren Publishers. Their professionalism, responsibility to tradition, and keen sense of style have made this a truly wonderful experience. Thank you to Matthew and all the talented and hardworking editorial staff at Koren.

Thank you to my wonderful school and community, Yeshivat Yavneh, where many of these teachings were first developed and shared with teenagers.

Thank you to my wife, Shira. We were standing on the shore of the Mediterranean Sea when you held a rough draft of this *Humash* in your hand. You looked at me and said: "This project must happen."

Thank you to my parents and family who continue to encourage, praise, and support my work.

Thank you to the Nagel family. The connection between our families goes back over sixty years, and our bond of Torah began with a family *havura* on Wilshire Boulevard.

Together with Jack, of blessed memory, we completed Sanhedrin and then began Bava Batra. It has been an exceptional privilege, and I have the *zekhut* of continuing this tradition with the family. This work was made possible by the incredible family vision gifted to the Nagels by Jack

and Gitta. To Dr. Ronnie, Esther, David, and Careena, my blessing is that the merit of this project may stand for your whole family's long life and health. May we continue to follow your trailblazing path, as together we celebrate this very historic moment – *The Koren Lev Ladaat Humash*.

Rabbi Shlomo Einhorn
Executive Editor

פרשת שמות

PARASHAT SHEMOT

The world of Genesis is no longer; the legendary, pioneering forefathers and foremothers are memories we learned about through stories we were told. We have grown so fast and so large that we are no longer just a family but the beginning of a nation, the descendants of Israel. And yet, with all of our success and comfort, there is a nagging feeling that something may not be right. Our neighbors look at us as differently. We feel that we don't really belong in the mainstream of society. And we struggle with our identity – are we who we are because of our ancient traditions, or because we are not like those around us?

PARASHAT SHEMOT

Yaakov and his twelve sons, all listed by name, went down to Egypt with their families – seventy in all. But in Egypt their clan became so big that “the land was filled with them.”

- 1 ¹ And these are the names of the sons of Yisrael who came to Egypt with Yaakov, each with
² his household: Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda; Yissakhar, Zevulun and Binyamin;
³ Dan and Naftali; Gad and Asher. The descendants of Yaakov were seventy in all, and
⁴ Yosef was already in Egypt. Then Yosef died, and all his brothers, and all that generation.
⁵ But the Israelites were fruitful and burgeoned; they multiplied and became exception-
⁶ ally strong, until the land was filled with them.
⁷

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. Notice that the term **בני ישראל** appears twice in this passage, and once at the beginning of the next passage. Does it mean the children of the man named *Yisrael* or the Israelite people? How do you know?
2. Do you recognize the words **פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד** from the book of Genesis? **מאד ותמלא הארץ אותם**

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Names in Tanakh are meaningful – they say something about the people described.

The man named Yaakov earned for himself an additional name, Yisrael. Those two names have very different connotations. The name Yaakov comes initially from the word **עקב**, “heel,” as Yaakov was holding Esav’s heel at birth, but also has echoes of trickery or deception. It was the wily, streetwise Yaakov who took Esav’s blessing and who worked hard to outwit Lavan. By contrast, the name Yisrael contains the word **ישר** – “straight,” “honest” – and is used to describe the man who “takes the high road.”

Interestingly, in these opening verses the Torah uses both the names Yaakov and Yisrael in referencing the family that went down to Egypt. As descendants of Yaakov, they may need

to be streetwise in dealing with the Egyptians on their way out of the bitter exile; as descendants of Yisrael, they will learn that to fulfill their ultimate destiny they will need to rise above that.

The Talmud cites a teaching from Reish Lakish: “God does not wound Israel unless He first creates for them the remedy” (Megilla 13b). The Sticher Rebbe comments that before beginning the slavery in Egypt, God brought them their remedy – their names, their identity, their purpose. Yaakov *and* Yisrael.

How does your name affect or express your identity?

פרשת שמות

א א וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרִימָה אֶת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ א
 ב וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ: רְאוּבֵן שִׁמְעוֹן לֵוִי וַיהוּדָה: יִשָּׁשׁכָר זְבוּלֹן וּבְנֵימִן:
 ג הֵן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָד וְאָשֶׁר: וַיְהִי כֹל־נֶפֶשׁ יָצְאֵי יַרְדֵּן־יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים
 ד וּנְפֹשׁ וַיֹּסֶף הִיּהָ בְּמִצְרַיִם: וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל־אָחָיו וְכָל־הַדּוֹר
 ה הָהוּא: וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבּוּ וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ בְּמֵאֵד מְאֹד
 וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

The passage opens with a brief listing of Yaakov and his clan of seventy as they descend to Egypt. The commentaries want to know why this is necessary, since there is a longer version of this listing (beginning and ending almost identically!) in Genesis 46:7–27.

רש"י

אף על פי שמנאן בחייהן בשמותן, חזר ומנאן במיתתן, להודיע חיבתן, שנמשלו לכוכבים שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר ובשמותם, שנאמר (ישעיה מ) "המוציא במספר צבאם לכולם בשם יקרא".

רשב"ם

מפני שרוצה לפרש ולומר "ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו" וגו' הוצרך לכפול ולומר בבואם למצרים לא היו אלא שבעים ואחר מות דוד ההוא פרו וישרצו.

רמב"ן

כי הכתוב ירצה למנות עניין הגלות מעת רדתם למצרים, כי אז גלו בראש גולים, כאשר פירשתי, ולפיכך יחזור אל תחילת העניין שהוא מפסוק "וכל זרעו הביא אתו מצרימה" (בראשית מו ז).

RASHI

Even though He counted them when they were alive, He counted them again after they had died to indicate how much He loves them.

RASHBAM

Because the Torah wanted to highlight that "*Benei Yisrael* were fruitful and burgeoned..." (1:7), it repeated that when they first came down to Egypt there were only seventy.

RAMBAN

Since the Torah wanted to begin the story of the exile from the time they actually went down to Egypt [not from the time the enslavement started], it repeated what it had said earlier.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Which of the above commentaries sees the entire passage as a unit?
- Which of the above suggests that we need to view Jewish history in a broad context of what comes before and after?
- Which of the above would serve as a message of consolation when the Jewish people are suffering and feeling abandoned by God?

⁸ Then a new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Yosef. And he said to his people,
⁹ “You see that the Israelite people are many and more powerful than we. Come, let us deal
¹⁰ wisely with them in case they increase, and if war breaks out they may join our enemies
¹¹ and fight against us and escape from the land.” So they placed slave masters over the
 Israelites to oppress them with forced labor; they built supply cities for Pharaoh: Pitom
¹² and Ramesses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they increased and spread;
¹³ and the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites. The Egyptians imposed backbreaking
¹⁴ labor on the Israelites, embittering their lives with harsh work in mortar and brick and

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. This passage describes a project to build a city using **חומר** and **לבנים**, and includes the words **הנה, הבה, פן**. Now look at the story of the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1–9) and see the similarities!
2. Notice which nation in these verses is consistently described in the plural and which in the singular. Based on that, how should you understand the phrase **למען ענתו בסבלותם**?
3. In preparing the Egyptians to isolate *Benei Yisrael*, Pharaoh claims that *Benei Yisrael* have become many and more powerful **במנו**. The word **במנו**, translated “than we” here (as in “more powerful than we”) can also mean “from us.” This would mean that Pharaoh is accusing *Benei Yisrael* of leeching from the Egyptians in order to grow. Do you know anywhere else where one of Avraham’s descendants is accused of become mighty at the expense of his host?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Abolitionist, reformer, and runaway slave Frederick Douglass once said: “The life of the nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful, and virtuous.” It is difficult to describe Pharaoh and his plan to enslave Israel as honest or virtuous. He slowly turned the people against Israel – first by painting Israel as a foreign implant, then by stoking fear that the outsiders are dangerous, that they will take over. The lies, fearmongering, and alienation fed on each other, until all of Israel was drafted into a national service which ultimately morphed into full servitude.

According to the Global Slavery Index, in 2017 there were an estimated forty million people enslaved worldwide. Are you aware of societies, even perhaps our own, that contain elements of Pharaoh’s plan to alienate and put down others because they are different or because their numbers are growing?

The experience of Israel’s slavery in Egypt is described in Tanakh (Deut. 4:20) as a **כור הברזל**, “smelting furnace” used for iron, suggesting that the exile there purified and strengthened the nation just as iron is purified and strengthened in a furnace. That trial by fire didn’t destroy us, but helped to prepare us for our future challenges.

There is another aspect to this imagery. According to the *Hovot HaLevavot*, the positive side of pain is that it humbles us. It shatters our arrogant thinking that we are all powerful.

Ego is a very powerful force. The need to feel significant, stand out, and be relevant can sometimes derail our best intentions. While a healthy sense of self is necessary, allowing one’s ego to take the driver’s seat can lead to devastating consequences. The *kur habarzel* of Egypt helped Israel to purify itself of its arrogance and appreciate the role of a Supreme Being.

How have painful or challenging experiences impacted you?

וַיִּקַּם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף: וַיֹּאמֶר
 אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעַצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: הֲבֵנָה נִתְחַכְמָה
 לוֹ פֶּן-יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה פִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלַּחְמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם-הוּא עַל-
 שְׂנְאֵינּוּ וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן-הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ עָלָיו שְׂרֵי מִסִּים
 לְמַעַן עַנְתּוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם וַיִּבְּן עָרֵי מִסְפְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת-פִּתּוֹם
 וְאֶת-רַעַמְסֵס: וּבְאִשֶׁר יַעֲנֶה אֹתוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וּכְן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצֹוּ מִפְּנֵי
 בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בַּפֶּרֶךְ: וַיִּמְרְדוּ
 אֶת-חַיֵּיהֶם בַּעֲבֹדָה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל-עֲבֹדָה בַּשָּׂדֶה

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

The Torah tells us that “a new king arose over Egypt, who had not known Yosef.” Even though many years have passed since Yosef was influential, given his immense legacy in Egypt, the commentaries want to know how it is possible that Pharaoh would not know Yosef.

<p>ר' עובדיה ספורנו ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים אשר לא ידע את יוסף – אף על פי שהיה זכרון ממנו בדברי הימים למלכים בלי ספק ... לא עלתה על לב המלך החדש אפשרות היותו מזה העם, ושהיה עם זה ראוי לשאת פנים לעמו בעבורו.</p>	<p>RABBI OVADYA SFORNO The royal Egyptian annals had undoubtedly recorded Yosef’s achievements... However, the new king did not imagine that Yosef was one of the Hebrews, nor that Israel deserved to be treated favorably because of him.</p>
<p>ר' שמשון רפאל הירש ויקם מלך חדש על מצרים וגו' – לפנינו כאן הדוגמא הקדומה ביותר של רשעות נגד היהודים.</p>	<p>RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH We have before us the earliest case of anti-Semitism in Jewish history.</p>
<p>רב דוד צבי הופמן מלך – חדש – מלך שנהג על-פי קווים דינאיים חדשים.</p>	<p>RABBI DAVID TZVI HOFFMAN The verse is telling us that the king adopted new policies.</p>

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Which of the commentaries understands that Pharaoh’s forgetting of Yosef was part of a natural political process of changing economic policy?
- Which of the commentaries understands Pharaoh’s decrees as a classic story of anti-Semitism?
- According to which of the commentaries is the forgetting of Yosef an innocent mistake?
- Do you see this Pharaoh instituting policies which are similar to, or dramatically different from, Yosef’s policies in Genesis 47?

When the Egyptian king fails to control the growth of Benei Yisrael, he instructs the midwives to secretly kill the male newborns. In the privacy of the birthing rooms, the midwives undermine the king's secret plan, but when that fails, he issues a public instruction to throw all male babies into the Nile.

15 all field labors; all the work they forced upon them was intended to break them. Then the
king of Egypt said to the midwives of the Hebrews (one named Shifra, the other Puah),
16 “When you help a Hebrew woman give birth, look on the birthstool. If it is a boy, kill
17 him, and if it is a girl, let her live.” But the midwives feared God, and did not do as the
18 king of Egypt ordered them. They let the babies live. Then the king of Egypt summoned
the midwives and demanded, “Why have you done this; why have you let the children
19 live?” But “Hebrew women,” the midwives replied, “are not like Egyptians. They are full of
20 vigor, and have already given birth by the time the midwife arrives.” God was good to the
21 midwives; and the people multiplied and grew very strong. And because the midwives
22 feared God, He granted them households. Then Pharaoh commanded his entire people,
saying, “Throw every boy that is born into the Nile, and let all the girls live.”

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- According to which of the commentaries would it have been easiest for Pharaoh to have kept this decree a secret?
- According to which interpretation was Pharaoh more likely to succeed with his plot?
- Which explanation do you think fits the story best?

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. Which three-letter Hebrew root appears eleven times in this passage? What do you think the Torah is trying to emphasize?
2. In the Torah, the phrase **יָרָא אֱלֹהִים** is not used frequently, and is often used to mean “being moral.” In this passage it is used twice(!) to describe the midwives. Do you think it makes more sense here to understand it as “God-fearing” or as “moral?”

WISDOM OF THE HEART

The Torah states that the midwives didn’t kill the babies because they feared God. Really? Do you need the fear of God to resist killing newborns?

Rabbi Mordechai Gifter once explained that we sometimes make all sorts of calculations to justify our actions. Here’s one the midwives could have used: “If I kill just a few babies, I can keep Pharaoh’s wrath at bay and save the rest of Israel.” This utilitarian approach, one that calculates which action will have the most benefit, demands that we ignore the immorality of the act itself. Yet some things are simply wrong, no matter the calculations.

When a command in the Torah tells us that something is categorically wrong, it is wrong.

It is this fear of God – this recognition that there are some things that we just don’t do, regardless of the cost-benefit analysis – that the Torah ascribes to the midwives.

Are there things you’ve done, which you rationalized with all sorts of justifications and calculations, that you later regretted? If you knew that you would eventually regret it, would you do it again?

טו את כל-עבדֹתֶם אֲשֶׁר-עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
 למִילֹדֹת הָעִבְרִית אֲשֶׁר שֵׁם הָאֶחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה:
 טז וַיֹּאמֶר בִּילְדֹכֶן אֶת-הָעִבְרִיּוֹת וְרֵאִיתֶן עַל-הָאֲבָנִים אֲסִיֵּן הוּא
 יז וְהַמֶּתֵן אֹתוֹ וְאִם-בַּת הוּא וְחַיָּה: וְתִירָאֵן הַמִּילֹדֹת אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים
 וְלֹא עֲשׂוּ כַאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֵלֵיהֶן מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְתַחֲיִין אֶת-הַיְלָדִים: •
 יח וַיִּקְרָא מֶלֶךְ-מִצְרַיִם לַמִּילֹדֹת וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶן מַדּוּעַ עֹשִׂיתֶן הַדָּבָר
 יט הַזֶּה וְתַחֲיִין אֶת-הַיְלָדִים: וְתֹאמְרֶן הַמִּילֹדֹת אַל-פְּרֹעָה כִּי לֹא
 כנָשִׁים הַמִּצְרִית הָעִבְרִית כִּי-חַיּוֹת הִנֵּה בְטָרִם תָּבוּא אֱלֹהֵן
 כ המִילֹדֹת וַיִּלְדוּ: וַיִּיטֹב אֱלֹהִים לַמִּילֹדֹת וַיִּרֶב הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ
 כא מְאֹד: וַיְהִי כִי-יִרְאוּ הַמִּילֹדֹת אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים:
 כב וַיִּצְוּ פְּרֹעָה לְכָל-עַמּוֹ לֵאמֹר כָּל-הַבֶּן הַיְלֹד הַיְאֻדָּה תִשְׁלִיכֶהוּ
 וְכָל-הַבַּת תַּחֲיִין:

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

As the oppression intensifies, Pharaoh instructs the midwives to kill the males as they are born. The midwives are called the מילדות העבריות, which could be read as “the Hebrew midwives” or as the “midwives for the Hebrews.”

רש"י RASHI

שפרה - יוכבר, על שם שמשפרת את הוולד.
 פועה - מרים, שפועה ומדברת והוגה לוולד, כדרך הנשים לפייס תינוק הבוכה.

Shifra – This is another name for Yokheved. She is referred to as Shifra because she would beautify [*meshaperet*] the children she birthed.
 Puah – This is another name for Miriam. She is referred to as Puah because she would call [*poah*] and coo to the child as women will do to soothe babies.

אברבנאל ABARBANEL

ולא היו עבריות, כי איך יבטח ליבו בנשים העבריות שימיתו ולדיהן, אבל היו נשים מצריות מילדות את העבריות, ר"ל עוזרות אותן ללדת, כמו שאמר "בילדכן את העבריות".

These midwives were clearly not Hebrews, for Pharaoh would hardly have trusted Hebrew women to kill their own people. Rather, they were Egyptian women who worked for the Hebrews, as is it stated: "When you help a Hebrew woman give birth" (1:16).

אבן עזרא IBN EZRA

אין ספק כי הרבה מחמש מאות מילדות היו, אלה שתניהן היו שרות עליהן.

For there must have been more than five hundred midwives, and these two [Shifra and Puah] were in charge of all them.

With the decree to kill male babies in the background, the scene shifts to one child, nameless, saved by a series of acts of kindness by anonymous women – his mother, his sister, and Pharaoh’s daughter. Like the midwives in the previous passage, these anonymous women successfully defy the seemingly all-powerful king.

- 2 ¹ A man of the house of Levi went and married a daughter of Levi. And she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw what a fine child he was, and for three months she
- 3 kept him hidden. And when she could no longer hide him, she took a papyrus basket and coated it with tar and pitch. She laid the child in it and placed it among the reeds by
- 4 the bank of the Nile, and his sister stood by at a distance to see what would happen to him. Pharaoh’s daughter came down to bathe in the Nile, while her attendants walked
- 5 by the riverbank. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it.
- 6 When she opened it she saw him there, the child; the boy was crying, and she was
- 7 moved to pity for him: “This must be one of the Hebrew boys.” Then his sister asked Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and fetch one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child
- 8 for you?” “Go,” said Pharaoh’s daughter. So the girl went away and called the child’s
- 9 mother. “Take this child,” Pharaoh’s daughter told her; “nurse him for me, and I will

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Which of the commentaries thinks that there was something miraculously different about Moshe?
- Why do you think that some commentaries go out of their way to show that Moshe was a “miracle baby” while others insist on demonstrating that, while there was something different about him, it was not extraordinary?

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. The phrase **כי טוב**, used to describe Moshe, is used in only one other place in the Torah. Where? What do you think the connection between those two places is?
2. Notice that the names of all the people in this scene are missing. Why do you think the Torah does this?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Here is an incredible irony. Pharaoh’s decree to throw the babies into the water leads to the story of Moshe in the reeds. That leads to his being saved by Pharaoh’s daughter, which ends with Moshe being raised in the palace, where he learns diplomacy and leadership from Pharaoh’s court! Pharaoh believed that he was undermining Israel. Little did he know that he was strengthening it.

In many of the Eastern martial arts, you use your opponent’s energy and inertia to your own advantage. Can you think of ways of taking charge of the energies that drive you to act improperly and using those very energies positively?

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 וַיֵּלֶךְ אִישׁ מִבֵּית לֵוִי וַיִּקַּח אֶת־בֵּת־לוֹי: וַתֵּהָר האֵשֶׁה וַתֵּלֶד
 בֵּן וַתֵּרֶא אֹתוֹ כִּי־טוֹב הוּא וַתִּצְפְּנֵהוּ שְׁלֹשָׁה יָרְדִים: וְלֹא־
 יָכֹלָה עוֹד הַצְּפִינוֹ וַתִּקַּח־לוֹ תֵּבֶת גָּמָא וַתַּחְמְרָה בַּחֲמֹר
 וּבִזְפֹת וַתִּשֶׂם בָּהּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּשֶׂם בַּסּוּף עַל־שֵׁפֶת הַיָּאֵר:
 וַתִּתְצַב אַחֲתוֹ מֵרַחֵק לִדְעָה מֵהַיַּעֲשֶׂה לוֹ: וַתֵּרָד בֵּת־פְּרַעֲהַ
 לְרַחֵץ עַל־הַיָּאֵר וַנִּעְרַתֶּיהָ הַלֵּכַת עַל־יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתֵּרֶא אֶת־
 הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת־אִמָּתָהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ: וַתִּפְתַּח
 וַתֵּרֶאֶהוּ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד וְהִנֵּה־נֹעַר בֶּכֶה וַתַּחְמַל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר
 מִי־לִדִי הָעִבְרִים זֶה: וַתֹּאמֶר אַחֲתוֹ אַל־בֵּת־פְּרַעֲהַ הָאֵלֶךְ
 וַקְרֵאתִי לֶךְ אֵשֶׁה מִיִּנְקַת מִן הָעִבְרִית וַתִּינַק לֶךְ אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד:
 וַתֹּאמֶר־לָהּ בֵּת־פְּרַעֲהַ לְכִי וַתֵּלֶךְ הָעֵלְמָה וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־אִם
 הַיֶּלֶד: וַתֹּאמֶר לָהּ בֵּת־פְּרַעֲהַ הִילִיכִי אֶת־הַיֶּלֶד הַזֶּה וְהִינַקְהוּ
 לִי וְאֲנִי אֶתֵּן אֶת־שְׂכָרְךָ וַתִּקַּח הָאֵשֶׁה הַיֶּלֶד וַתִּנְקֵהוּ:

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

All mothers think that their babies are beautiful and would do anything to protect their newborns, yet the Torah says about Moshe specifically that his mother saw that he was טוב and therefore hid him. What was different about Moshe?

רש"י

RASHI

כשנולד, נתמלא כל הבית כולו אורה.

When [Moshe] was born, the entire house was filled with light.

רשב"ם

RASHBAM

משה נולד לסוף ששה חדשים, ולפיכך יכלה להצפינו שלשה חדשים, שהמצריים היו מבקרים למעוברות לסוף תשעה חדשים. לכן נסתכלה בו בשעת לידה אם הוא נפל ולא תטרח בהטמנתו, וראתהו כי טוב ויפה הוא, וראתהו כי טוב ויפה הוא - כי גמרו סימניו שיערו וציפורניו ... וידעה שהוא בר קיימא.

Moshe was born after a six-month pregnancy (this is why she was able to hide him for three months, for the Egyptians would only visit the pregnant women after nine months). She examined him as soon as he was born to make sure he had survived. If he had been a stillborn, she would not have had to go through the trouble of hiding him. But she saw that he was a fine, healthy child, with fully developed hair and nails...and she knew that he was viable.

10 pay you your wage.” So the woman took the child and nursed him. The child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh’s daughter and he became her son. She named him Moshe, 11 “because,” she said, “I drew him out of the water.” One day, when Moshe had grown up, he went out to his people and saw their forced labor. And he noticed an Egyptian 12 striking a Hebrew: one of his brothers. Looking this way and that and seeing no one, he struck down the Egyptian and hid his body in the sand. The next day he went out and 13 saw two Hebrews fighting. He asked the guilty one, “Why are you striking your own neighbor?” The man said, “Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you intend 14 to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?” Then Moshe was afraid; “Surely,” he thought, 15 “the thing has become known.” Word reached Pharaoh and he sought to kill Moshe. But Moshe fled his presence and went to live in the land of Midian. There he sat down

- What two possibilities do the commentaries suggest as to how Moshe knew that he was from *Benei Yisrael*? According to which of those explanations would Moshe have been more likely to feel a deep connection with them?
- Being raised in the palace, Moshe could probably have chosen to identify as an Egyptian and lived his life as an Egyptian prince. Why would he choose to give that up? Would you?
- Was it an accident or part of the divine plan that the future redeemer was not raised amongst his own people? What does Ibn Ezra say about this? What can you add to his points?

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. Notice that **וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה** is written twice in two consecutive verses. appears eight times. Which word, which replaces **וַיִּגְדַּל**, appears five times in this passage?
2. Notice that in the first passage of this chapter, the word **וַיִּגְדַּל**

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Immediately after the Torah records that Moshe grew up, it says that he saw the suffering of his kinsmen.

Rabbi Yitzhak Eliyahu Landau comments that Moshe’s greatness was directly linked to his sensitivity to the suffering of others. Rabbi Yitzhak of Volozhin similarly comments that

the essence of being a human is being humane – caring and empathetic to others.

**How does helping others
enhance your own character?**

QUICK BITE

The Torah states that before striking the Egyptian, Moshe looked “this way and that.” A wise man once commented that the Torah is describing Moshe’s internal struggle at that moment. Moshe was at a critical decision point: he needed to choose between two ways. One way would have him continue his life as an Egyptian prince; the other way would have him abandon the power and

prestige and embrace the heritage of his people. But in this place of conflict: **וַיִּרְא כִּי אִין אִישׁ** – “he saw that he was no man.” If we cannot take a stand as to who we really are, we lose our own identity, as a people and as individuals.

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבַאֲהוּ לְבַת־פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי־לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ
 מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן־הַמַּיִם מְשִׁיתָהוּ: וַיְהִי ׀ בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם
 וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל־אָחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסִבְלַתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרַיִ
 מִכָּה אִישׁ־עִבְרִי מֵאָחָיו: וַיִּפֶן כָּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּךְ
 אֶת־הַמִּצְרַיִ וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַּחֹל: וַיֵּצֵא בַּיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וְהָנָה שְׁנֵי־אֲנָשִׁים
 עִבְרָיִם נָצִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָרֹשָׁע לְמָה תִּבְּה רַעַךְ: וַיֹּאמֶר מִי שָׂמְךָ
 לְאִישׁ שָׂר וְשִׁפְט עָלֵינוּ הֲלֹהָרְגָנוּ אֶתְּהָ אָמַר פֶּאֶשֶׁר הִדַּגְתָּ אֶת־
 הַמִּצְרַיִ וַיֵּרָא מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר אָכֵן נֹדַע הַדָּבָר: וַיִּשְׁמַע פַּרְעֹה
 אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וַיִּבְקֶשׁ לְהַרְגוֹ אֶת־מֹשֶׁה וַיִּבְרַח מֹשֶׁה מִפְּנֵי

שלישי

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

Moshe was raised by Pharaoh's daughter from a very early age, yet he identifies himself in this incident with *Benei Yisrael*. Where did that identity come from?

אברבנאל

ABARBANEL

לפי שמשה תמיד דבקה נפשו ביוכבד אשר גדלתו ובבניה ואחרי שנתגדל ידע מהם אמתת ענינו ושהוא מילדי העברים עם היות שבת פרעה גדלתו כבן ולכן היה יוצא אל אחיו העברים.

Moshe had always been attached to Yokheved, who had begun to raise him, and to her children. Once he grew up, he learned from them his true identity, that he was a Hebrew child, even though Pharaoh's daughter had raised him as a son. He therefore began to go out to his Hebrew kinsmen.

אבן עזרא

IBN EZRA

אולי סבב השם זה שיגדל משה בבית המלכות להיות נפשו העליונה בדרך מלכות והרגילות, ולא תהיה נפשו שפלה רגילה להיות בבית עבדים. הלא תראה, כי הרג המצרי בעבור שהוא עושה חמס. והושיע בנות מדין מהרועים, בעבור שהיו עושים חמס להשקות צאנם המים שדלו.

Perhaps God arranged that Moshe should grow up in the royal household so that he would be erudite and cultured, rather than vulgar and slavish. This noble character was expressed when he killed the Egyptian for performing an injustice and when he gallantly saved the daughters of the Midianite from the oppression of the shepherds, who had been stealing their water.

ר' שמשון רפאל הירש

RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

לא קראה לו בשם "משוי" – "מי שנמשה מתוך המים", אלא "משה" – "הגואל מן המים". אפשר שיש בכך רמז לכיוון החינוך שנתנה בת המלך לבנה המאומץ. בנוסף על כך, שמו העברי יעשה אותו תמיד מודע למוצאו.

Pharaoh's daughter did not name the foundling "Mashui," meaning "one drawn up from the water," but "Moshe" – "he who redeems from the water." Perhaps by choosing the latter, the princess had already begun her efforts to shape the character of her adopted son. Furthermore, his Hebrew name would always remind him of his origin.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

Moshe flees Pharaoh and goes to Midian, where he again saves helpless people from their tormentors. This time his efforts are rewarded: he is invited to stay with Yitro, whose daughters he rescued. He marries Tzipora, one of the daughters, and has a son whom he names Gershom.

- 16 beside a well. The priest of Midian had seven daughters; they came to draw water and
 17 filled the troughs to water their father's flock. Then the shepherds arrived and started to
 drive the young women away. But Moshe stood up to defend them, and then watered
 18 their flock. When the sisters returned to Reuel their father, he asked them, "How is it
 19 that you have come back so quickly today?" They said, "An Egyptian rescued us from the
 20 shepherds. He even drew water for us and watered the flock." "Where is he?" he asked
 his daughters. "Why did you leave him there? Invite him in to have something to eat."
 21 Moshe accepted an invitation to stay with the man, and he gave Moshe his daughter
 22 Tzipora in marriage. She gave birth to a son, and Moshe named him Gershom, saying,
 "I have been a stranger in an alien land."

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. Notice that in the beginning of this chapter Moshe is saved through the kindness of women; in the end of the chapter it is he who shows kindness to and saves women he has never met before.
2. Who did Yitro's daughters think Moshe was?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Women are an essential part of this redemption saga. Notice the stars of this story:

1. The midwives, who disobey Pharaoh's command to kill the baby Hebrew boys.
2. Moshe's mother, who defies the royal edict and hides baby Moshe.
3. Moshe's sister, who doesn't let her baby brother out of her sight.

4. Pharaoh's daughter, who defies her father and rescues the Hebrew baby.

After Moshe is saved by all these women, it is his turn, as he saves Yitro's daughters – one of whom will become his wife and will ultimately save him too!

What are ways we can be players, rather than bystanders, in the history of the Jewish people?

QUICK BITE

After killing the Egyptian, Moshe runs away and remains in Midian for many years, perhaps in search of spiritual elevation, like his father-in-law, Yitro. But God will not let him escape his destiny. He summons Moshe from his spiritual quest in order to save *Benei Yisrael*. In case Moshe had any second thoughts

about abandoning his spiritual mission for an earthly one, Tzipora – in circumcising their son, binding him to his people, and thereby saving Moshe's life – reminds Moshe that he cannot cut himself off from his people, even in pursuit of a path to higher spirituality.

טז פְּרָעָה וַיֵּשֶׁב בְּאֶרֶץ־מִדְיָן וַיֵּשֶׁב עַל־הַבְּאֵר: וּלְכֹהֵן מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַת
 פְּנוֹת וַתְּבִאנָהּ וַתְּדַלְּנָהּ וַתְּמַלְּאנָהּ אֶת־הַרְהֻטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת
 יז צֹאן אַבְיָהֶן: וַיְבֹאוּ הָרְעִים וַיִּגְדְּשׁוּם וַיִּקַּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשִׁיעַן וַיִּשְׁק
 יח אֶת־צֹאנָם: וַתְּבִאנָהּ אֶל־דְּעוּאֵל אַבְיָהֶן וַיֹּאמֶר מִדּוּעַ מְהֵרָתָן
 טט בֵּא הַיּוֹם: וַתֹּאמְרֵן אִישׁ מִצְרַיִם הִצִּילָנוּ מִיַּד הָרְעִים וְגַם־דָּלָה
 כ דָּלָה לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁק אֶת־הַצֹּאן: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־בְּנֹתָיו וַאֲנִי לְמַה זֶה
 כא עֲזַבְתֶּן אֶת־הָאִישׁ קְרָאֵן לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל לֶחֶם: וַיּוֹאֵל מֹשֶׁה לְשַׁבֵּת
 כב אֶת־הָאִישׁ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־צַפְרָה בְּתוֹ לְמֹשֶׁה: וַתֵּלֶד בֶּן וַיִּקְרָא אֶת־
 שְׁמוֹ גֵרְשֹׁם כִּי אָמַר גֵּר הָיִיתִי בְּאֶרֶץ נְכַרִּיָּה:

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

The Torah uses an unusual word, **וּיּוֹאֵל**, to describe Moshe's decision to stay with Yitro. The commentaries debate the meaning of this word, which affects our understanding of Moshe's decision.

רלב"ג

וּיּוֹאֵל משה - הוא מענין החפץ והרצון.

RALBAG

The term **וּיּוֹאֵל** suggests that Moshe willingly and happily stayed in Yitro's home.

מלבי"ם

וּיּוֹאֵל - כבר בארתי (הושע ה) שפעל יאל מורה שנתרצה אחר שמאן תחלה בדבר, מבואר שמשה לא נתרצה תיכף, וכן אחר שנתרצה לא נתרצה מצד שהוא כהן מדין רק לשבת את האיש מצד מעלתו וחכמתו, כי כהונתו לע"ז היה נגד רצון משה.

MALBIM

I have explained (Hos. 5) that the verb **י-אל** denotes a person's agreement to something after having first refused it. It is clear then that Moshe did not immediately agree, and even after he consented, he did so not out of regard for Yitro's priesthood, but for his virtue and wisdom. For the fact that Yitro was a priest in the worship of idols was distasteful to Moshe.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Why would Moshe want to stay with Yitro? Why would he not want to stay? Which of these do you think makes more sense in this scene?
- There is a similar story to this one in the book of Genesis – about someone who runs away from his homeland, comes to a well, acts heroically to ensure that there is water for a local woman's sheep, and ends up marrying her. Which story is that? What might we learn from that story about whether or not Moshe wanted to stay with Yitro?

Pharaoh dies, and the suffering of Benei Yisrael causes them to cry out. God hears their cries and decides that the time has come to fulfill the covenant he made with Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov.

- 23 Years passed, and the king of Egypt died. The Israelites sighed in their enslavement and
 24 cried out, and from their servitude their plea for help rose up to God. And God heard
 their groaning, and remembered His covenant with Avraham, with Yitzhak, and with
 25 Yaakov. God saw the Israelites, and God knew.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Ralbag suggests that the slavery intensified after Pharaoh's death, even though the Torah mentions nothing about it. What forced Ralbag to suggest an interpretation that seems to have no grounding in the Torah?
- One of the commentaries suggests that there is no connection at all between the death of Pharaoh and the cries of *Benei Yisrael*. If so, then why does the Torah even mention the death of Pharaoh?
- Which commentary says that the suffering did not change at all with the death of Pharaoh? If there was no change, then why did they start to cry out now? Can you imagine a similar thing happening today with, say, an important figure in your school or community replacing one who is retiring?

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. Notice how verbs are used in these three verses to describe the relationship between God and the cries of the people. Can you figure out how those verbs are different?
2. Look carefully at the description of *Benei Yisrael* crying. Are they crying to God or not?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

It is a popular notion that God waits for us to cry out before He helps us. The Rebbe of Izhbitz suggests that sometimes we are so used to being crushed that we don't even have the capacity to dream of a better life. Rather than letting us suffer endlessly, sometimes God will allow us to be squeezed just a little more, forcing us to recognize that we cannot bear it anymore. It is then

that we cry out, allowing God to do what He long waited to do: redeem us from our suffering. The first light of dawn comes after the darkest part of the night.

Are there things about yourself that are not as you would like them to be but you just accept them as is?

QUICK BITE

Moshe sees the plight of his brothers. That "seeing" is far more than vision – it is the capacity to understand what others do not, the ability to empathize with those in pain. At the end of **ברכת המזון** there is a quote from Psalms, which contains King David's declaration: "I have been young, and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken" (Ps. 37:25). Is that real? Did he never

live amongst real people, where even the righteous suffer? Rabbi Leo Jung suggests that this means that, like Moshe, King David never saw a righteous person suffering and left him to suffer.

How good are we at truly seeing other people – their pain, their struggles?

כג וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָרַבִּים הָהֵם וַיָּמָת מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וַיֵּאָנְחוּ בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל
 מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה וַיִּזְעֻקוּ וַתַּעַל שׁוֹעַתָם אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִן־הָעֲבֹדָה׃
 כד וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹהִים אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם וַיִּזְכֹּר אֱלֹהִים אֶת־בְּרִיתוֹ אֶת־
 כה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב׃ וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־פְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

The Torah seems to connect the death of Pharaoh with the cries of *Benei Yisrael*, but one would think that there would have actually been some relief after the death of their chief oppressor. Therefore, the commentaries try to explain the link between the death of Pharaoh and their cries.

רלב"ג

RALBAG

אמר שבזה העת הרב שהיה מעת צאת משה ממצרים עד הזמן שגולד בו גרשום, מת מלך מצרים, וקם תחתיו מלך אחר והוא הכביד העבודה מאד, ולזה נאנחו בני ישראל מן העבודה, ויצעקו אל ה' יתעלה, ועלתה צעקתם אליו מן העבודה.

The Torah is describing here the events that occurred during the lengthy time between Moshe's departure from Egypt and the birth of his son Gershom. While he was away from his people, the king who had threatened him died and was succeeded by a new monarch. The latter greatly intensified the labor requirements of *Benei Yisrael*. That in turn led the nation to sigh in their enslavement and to cry out to the LORD. But He heard their agony and was aware of their suffering.

ר' יוסף בכור שור

RABBI YOSEF BEKHOR SHOR

כל זמן שהיה אותו מלך חי, היו מצפים שמא כשימות זה יתבטלו גזירות. וכיון שמת ולא נתבטלו גזירותיו, אמרו: עתה אין לדבר סוף, לא נצא עוד מעמל זה, ויאנחו.

So long as the previous king was alive, there was anticipation that when he would die, the decrees would be annulled. So when he died and the decrees continued, they said: "Now we see that there is no end to this business; we will never be freed from this labor," and they sighed.

ר' יוסף קרא

RABBI YOSEF KARA

שכל זמן שהיה פרעה קיים, אם יאמר הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה לכה ואשלחך אל פרעה, משה ישיבנו איך אלך אל פרעה והוא מבקש להרגני, כדכתיב ויבקש להרוג את משה. וזהו שאמר לו כי מתו כל האנשים המבקשים את נפשך.

As long as Pharaoh lived, the Holy One, blessed be He, refrained from ordering Moshe to go to Egypt to confront the king. Had God not waited, Moshe would have justifiably responded: How can I show my face before Pharaoh? The man seeks my death! For the verse states, "Word reached Pharaoh and he sought to kill Moshe" (2:15). This is why God assured Moshe that he could safely return to Egypt, telling him that "all those who sought your life have died" (4:19).

While chapter 1 speaks about the suffering of all of Benei Yisrael, chapter 2 shifts the focus specifically to Moshe. In this chapter Moshe is brought into the story of Benei Yisrael, and it begins with his first encounter with God, at the burning bush.

- 3 1 One day Moshe was tending the flock of his father-in-law Yitro, priest of Midian. He led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horev, the mountain of God.
- 2 Then an angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from the midst of a bush
- 3 – and he saw – the bush was ablaze with fire but was not consumed. Moshe said, “I
- 4 must turn aside to see this wonder. Why does the bush not burn up?” The LORD saw that he had turned aside to look, and God called to him from within the bush: “Moshe,
- 5 Moshe.” He answered, “Here I am.” Then God said, “Do not come close. Remove the

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. The word **סנה** appears only six times in all of Tanakh – five times here and once in Deuteronomy, referring back to this scene. Why would the Torah choose a word whose meaning we can only guess to describe the medium for this encounter?
2. The word **מדבר**, usually translated as “desert” or “wilderness,” actually means “the place where sheep are led to graze,” since it is far away from where crops are cultivated.
3. There are only two places in Tanakh where someone is told to take off his shoes in the context of an encounter with a divine being. Where is the other one?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

Moshe’s encounter at the bush sets in motion an irreversible process in which a fugitive from Egypt who became a Midianite shepherd becomes Moshe Rabbeinu. The scene in which the first encounter happens, including the imagery of the bush that burns but doesn’t burn up, is filled with meaning. Let’s look at three messages relevant for leadership.

1. Leadership demands passion (burning) and resilience (doesn’t burn up). Great leaders need the stamina to recover and learn from setbacks, and that can be fueled by a passion to accomplish the mission.
2. Moshe’s first reaction to the mission with which he is tasked is to question himself. “Who am I?” he asks. Stephen Covey, in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, says that one of the essential components of leadership is seeking not to change others but rather to begin with addressing who you are internally. Like Moshe.
3. The prize is sometimes within the flames – getting dirty and bruised and singed. Garth Brooks, the legendary country singer, expressed it this way: “Life is not tried, it is merely survived, if you’re standing outside the fire.” Our most significant moments of growth and accomplishment take work, commitment, pain, and perseverance. You can’t rescue the kingdom without slaying the dragon; and certainly, one can’t create a flame of eternity without giving something up.

Have you ever had a “burning bush” moment? Are there things that you feel passionately about, that you would be prepared to sacrifice for?

ג א וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים: וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חִתָּנוּ ב רביעי
 כִּהְיָן מִדִּין וַיְנַהֵג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחַר הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים
 ב חֲרֵבָה: וַיֵּרָא מִלְּאֶךְ יְהוָה אֵלָיו בְּלִבַּת־אִשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֶּנֶה וַיֵּרָא
 ג וְהִנֵּה הַסֶּנֶה בַּעַר בְּאִשׁ וְהַסֶּנֶה אֵינָנו אֶפְלָ: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְדֶּה־
 נָא וְאֵרְאֶה אֶת־הַמְּרֹאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדֹּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסֶּנֶה:
 ד וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה בִּי סֵר לְרֵאשִׁית וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֶּנֶה
 ה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִנִּי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם שְׁל־
 נַעֲלִיךָ יַמְעַל רִגְלֶיךָ בִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אֶתָּה עֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדַמַּת־

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

The Torah describes that Moshe had guided Yitro's sheep to "the far side of the wilderness" (אזור המדבר). This unusual phrase does not appear anywhere else in Tanakh, so the commentaries assume that it is coming to teach something special about this.

רש"י

להתרחק מן הגזל, שלא ידעו בשדות אחרים.

RASHI

This was so that the sheep would not graze in others' fields, to distance himself from theft.

ר' יוסף בכור שור

העביר להם המדבר, שבמדבר לא היה מרעה, כי בארץ מדבר אין עולין עשבים.

RABBI YOSEF BEKHOR SHOR

Moshe led Yitro's flock past the wilderness, for the wilderness contains no pasture land for sheep to graze on.

העמק דבר

המשמעות שהיה משתדל להנהיג במקום שהוא יותר מדבר, ונמשך אחר מקום מדבר, כדי שיוכל להתבודד ולחקור אחר אלקות וכדומה.

HAAMEK DAVAR

By telling us that Moshe "led the flock to the far side of the wilderness," the text reveals that Moshe was drawn to the solitary landscapes of the desert. It was there that he would be able to meditate, and to ruminate about God and other lofty matters.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Which quality of Moshe does each of the commentaries suggest that the Torah is trying to highlight?
- Which of those qualities do you think is most essential for the person who is going to take on God's mission and bring *Benei Yisrael* out of Egypt?

God introduces Himself to Moshe and describes the suffering of Benei Yisrael. He states His intention to save them from their oppression and bring them to the land of the Canaanites. Finally, He tells Moshe that He intends for Moshe to go to Pharaoh and take Benei Yisrael out of Egypt.

- 6 shoes from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I,” He said, “am the God of your father, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzhak, and the God of Yaakov.”
- 7 Then Moshe hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. The LORD continued, “I have seen My people’s suffering in Egypt; I have heard them cry out amid their oppressors;
- 8 I know their anguish. So I have come to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and bring them up from that land to one that is good, spacious, a land flowing with milk and honey, the place of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and
- 9 Jebusites. Now the cry of the Israelites has reached Me; I have seen the oppression the
- 10 Egyptians subject them to. So go: I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring My people, the

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. There are two halves to verse 10. How are they connected?
2. At the end of the previous chapter, when we hear that God has decided to intervene, we are told that God hears the groans of *Benei Yisrael*. When God speaks with Moshe here, He says that he sees their suffering. In this context, is there a difference between God seeing and God hearing?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

In *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey writes that that second habit of successful individuals is that they begin with the end in mind – סוף מעשה במחשבה תחילה. To know what to do, you need to know where you want to end up. When that

becomes clear, then all the things we need to do in order to get there become meaningful stepping stones toward that goal.

How do we figure out what our big goals in life are?

QUICK BITE

It was the last few weeks of high school, and Shlomo’s mother told him that a great rabbi was staying at their neighbor’s house. The Kaliver Rebbe was in town, known for his piercing insight and his spiritual vision. Shlomo walked over and waited for him in the backyard. The rabbi appeared, majestic in his gold and white Sabbath clothes, a calmness on his worn face. He shook Shlomo’s hand and looked deep into his eyes. They stood there, frozen, for what felt like a long time. And then he spoke:

“When Moshe approached the burning bush God told

him to take off his נעל, “shoe,” for the place upon which he was standing was holy. But there is a deeper, richer understanding of this: consider that the word נעל can also mean “lock.” This gives completely different meaning to the command. ‘Remove the shackles from your feet, for if you realize that anywhere you stand is holy ground – you are free.’”

At that moment Shlomo felt a surge of exhilaration. *You are never trapped, he thought. There is always another way.*

1 קִדְּשׁ הוּא: וַיֹּאמֶר אֲנֹכִי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ אֱלֹהֵי אַבְרָהָם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק
 וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב וַיִּסְתַּר מֹשֶׁה פָּנָיו כִּי יָרָא מֵהֵבִיט אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים:
 2 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה רְאֵה רָאִיתִי אֶת־עַנְי עַמִּי אֲשֶׁר בְּמִצְרַיִם וְאֶת־
 3 צַעֲקֹתָם שָׁמַעְתִּי מִפְּנֵי נְגִשָׁיו כִּי יָדַעְתִּי אֶת־מַכְאֲבוֹ: וְאָרַד
 לְהַצִּילוֹ ׀ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם וְלַהֲעֲלֹתוֹ מִן־הָאָרֶץ הַהִוא אֶל־אֶרֶץ
 טוֹבָה וְרַחֲבָה אֶל־אֶרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ אֶל־מְקוֹם הַפְּנִיעֵנִי
 4 וְהַחֲתִי וְהֶאֱמַרְתִּי וְהִפְרֹזִי וְהַחֲוִי וְהִיבּוֹסִי: וְעַתָּה הִנֵּה צַעֲקַת
 5 בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בָּאָה אֵלָי וְגַם־רָאִיתִי אֶת־הַלַּחֵן אֲשֶׁר מִצְרַיִם
 6 לַחֲצִים אֹתָם: וְעַתָּה לֵכָה וְאֶשְׁלַחְךָ אֶל־פְּרַעֲזָה וְהוֹצֵא אֶת־עַמִּי

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

Language describing God's physical attributes or movement makes many of the commentaries uncomfortable. This is called *anthropomorphism*, the use of human attributes to describe something that is not human. The language here that God "descended" to save *Benei Yisrael* is an example of that.

רמב"ן

שנתגליתני על ההר הזה באש.

RAMBAN

I have revealed Myself on this mountain through fire.

ר' שמשון רפאל הירש

ה' יורד ומתערב בעניני העולם, כדי למנוע את הגדלת המרחק שבין השמים והארץ. בכך הוא מקרב את העולם צעד אחד קדימה לייעודו - ליום בו שכינתו תוכל לשוב ולשכון בתחתונים.

RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

The LORD does make a practice of descending to earth in order to intervene in the running of His world. In this way, He prevents the gap between heaven and earth from widening. This in turn has the effect of drawing the world closer to its destiny, to an era when the Divine Presence can once again return and dwell in the lower realms of His creation.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- The word **וארד**, translated here as "I have come," literally means "I have descended." According to Ramban, when God says that He descended to save *Benei Yisrael*, when did that actually happen?
- According to Rabbi Hirsch, what does "God descending" actually mean?
- According to which of the two commentaries can we sometimes still reasonably expect God to descend even today?

Moshe, who fled Egypt decades earlier and who has settled into the comfortable life of a Midianite shepherd, has multiple hesitations about accepting God's mission. He questions his own worthiness as well as his ability to handle questions from Benei Yisrael.

- 11 Israelites, out of Egypt.” But “Who am I,” said Moshe to God, “to go to Pharaoh, to bring
 12 the Israelites out of Egypt?” God replied, “I will be with you. Proof that I have sent you
 will come when, having brought the people out of Egypt, you come to serve God upon
 13 this mountain.” Moshe said to God, “When I go to the Israelites and tell them, ‘Your
 fathers’ God has sent me to you,’ they will ask me, ‘What is His name?’ What shall I
 14 say?” God replied to Moshe, “I will be what I will be.” He said, “This is what you shall tell
 15 the Israelites: I will be sent me to you.” Then God said to Moshe, “You shall say this to
 the Israelites: The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzḥak,

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- According to which of the commentaries are the two doubts that Moshe expressed connected to each other?
- Each of the commentaries has a very different understanding of Moshe's view of *Benei Yisrael*. According to one, Moshe was afraid that he was unworthy of leading them; according to a second, he thought that *Benei Yisrael* were unworthy of leaving Egypt; and a third opinion says that *Benei Yisrael* need a good leader who can transform them and Moshe believes that he lacks those qualities. Can you match the commentaries with their opinions?
- Do you think that Moshe is really concerned about these things, or is he just looking for excuses not to go?

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. In the Torah, when one person is speaking, the next **וַיֹּאמֶר** usually indicates that the other party is responding. In unusual circumstances, **וַיֹּאמֶר** appears two or more times in a row – all referring the same person speaking – and there is always a good reason for breaking up the speech that way. Look at verses 14–15 – how many times can you find **וַיֹּאמֶר** in a row that all refer to God speaking? Can you figure out why?
2. In verse 12, it is not clear how the various parts of the verse fit together. Can you figure out the problem?

WISDOM OF THE HEART

When Pharaoh's daughter discovers the baby in the basket, the Torah states that “she saw that the baby was crying.” Rabbi Menahem Mendel of Vorke, from whom we have only eight teachings, asks: why doesn't the Torah say that she heard that the baby was crying? The Rebbe of Vorke responds that the baby wasn't actually crying out loud; rather, it was crying in its heart.

The Biale Rebbe suggests that God's message of

אָהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אָהִיָּה is meant to convey the idea that in exile, God sees the prayers of Israel, even when those prayers are in their hearts because they cannot find the words with which to express themselves.

How do you think a person can develop the capacity to see someone else's pain even before it is expressed?

יא בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים מִי אָנֹכִי כִּי
 יב אֵלֶיךָ אֶל־פְּרַעֲזָה וְכִי אוֹצִיא אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם: וַיֹּאמֶר
 כִּי־אֵהְיָה עִמָּךְ וְזֶה־לְךָ הָאוֹת כִּי אָנֹכִי שְׁלַחְתִּיךָ בְּהוֹצִיאֲךָ אֶת
 יג הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה: וַיֹּאמֶר
 מֹשֶׁה אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים הֲנִה אָנֹכִי בֶּאֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִמְרַתִּי
 לָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם וְאִמְרוּ לִי מִה־שְּׁמוֹ מַה
 יד אָמַר אֱלֹהִים: וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אֵהְיָה אֲשֶׁר אֵהְיָה
 טו וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵהְיָה שְׁלַחְנִי אֵלֵיכֶם: וַיֹּאמֶר
 עוֹד אֱלֹהִים אֶל־מֹשֶׁה כֹּה תֹאמַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

Moshe expresses doubts about the mission, related to both himself and *Benei Yisrael*, but the exact content of those doubts is a subject of great debate.

רש"י

מי אנכי - מה אני חשוב לדבר עם המלכים.
 וכי אוציא את בני ישראל - ואף אם חשוב אני, מה זכו ישראל שייעשה להם נס.

כלי יקר

וכי אוציא את בני ישראל כי אומה גבוהה ורמה כזאת בני אברהם יצחק ויעקב עם גדול ורם איך ילכו אחרי שפל ובזוי כמוני?

ר' שמשון רפאל הירש

משה ... ידע היטב שאין בו מאומה מהחומר, אשר מלהיבי המונים, מנהיגים, מפקדי צבאות, גיבורים ושליטים, נוצרים ממנו. היה זה אך טבעי שאדם כזה יהסס מלקבל על עצמו שליחות כזאת ... האם אין צד שהשליחות כולה תבוא לידי כשלון, מכיון שהוא עלול להיות חסר אונים בפני פרעה ... ובמקרה כזה, האם לא יביט אך ורק אסון כפול ומכופל על ראש אחיו? וכי לא היה רשאי להיות מסופק, אם יש לאישיות את הכח המרשים והכובש את לב האחרים, הנדרש בכדי להפוך אומה של עבדים לעם ה'?

RASHI

"Who am I" – what is my importance that I might speak with kings?
 "To bring the Israelites out" – And even if I am important, what did the Israelites do to merit a miracle being performed for them?

KELI YAKAR

Moshe believed himself unworthy of leading the great and exalted nation of *Benei Yisrael* – the descendants of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov. For why would a noble and distinguished people like the Israelites agree to follow such a lowly and despised individual like him?

RABBI SAMSON RAPHAEL HIRSCH

Moshe...recognized in himself an absence of those characteristics possessed by agitators of multitudes, leaders of armies, heroes, and rulers. It was only natural that such a person would hesitate to accept such a mission upon himself. ... Because Moshe was bereft of any inherent leadership abilities, he believed that the job God was foisting on him was doomed to failure... And if that were to happen, would not Moshe's bumbling bring even greater suffering upon the heads of his brethren? Surely Moshe could be excused for doubting whether he possessed the skill to capture the imagination of the masses, a quality necessary for transforming the people from a nation of quivering slaves into the proud servants of the Lord.

and the God of Yaakov, has sent me to you. This is My name forever, and this is how I
 16 will be remembered through the ages. Go, gather the elders of Israel and tell them: The
 LORD God of your fathers appeared to me – the God of Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaakov
 17 – saying: I have taken note of you and what is being inflicted upon you in Egypt. And
 I promise to bring you out of the misery of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites and
 Hittites, the Amorites and Perizzites, the Hivites and Jebusites, to a land flowing with
 18 milk and honey. They will listen to you. Then you and the elders of Israel shall go to
 the king of Egypt and tell him, ‘The LORD God of the Hebrews has revealed Himself
 to us. Send us forth now for a three-day journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the
 19 LORD our God.’ But I know that even by a mighty hand the king of Egypt would not
 send you forth. So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders I
 20 will do there. After that, he will send you forth. And I will grant this people favor in the
 21 eyes of the Egyptians, so that when you leave, you will not leave empty-handed. Every
 22 woman shall ask her neighbor, ask any woman lodging with her, for objects of silver and

ר' עובדיה ספורנו

אף על פי שתקבלו הכל מהם דרך השאלה, ותהיו חייבים להחזיר, הנה תקנו אחר כך את הכל בדין, ברדפם אחרים להלחם בכם ולשלול את שללכם. כי אמנם כאשר מתו באותה המלחמה, כי ה' נלחם, היה בדין מדה כנגד מדה כל שלל הרודפים לנרדפים, כמנהג בכל מלחמה.

ר' דוד צבי הופמן

לפי שהאמתלה ללכת דרך שלושת ימים ליבוח וכו' תגרוד אחריה שבני ישראל ייאלצו להשאיר את רכושם בארץ מצרים, מבטיח ה' כי למרות זאת לא יצאו משם ריקם, אלא שבעד הרכוש שישאירו במצרים יפוצו על ידי אותם כלי כסף וכלי זהב שישאלו – ידרשו מן המצרים.

RABBI OVADYA SFORNO

Although you will receive all of these objects from the Egyptians as loans, and you will be obligated to return them, you will later acquire all of it rightfully. This will happen when Egypt chases after you to fight you and to take your plunder. Since they will die in that battle when God fights on Israel's behalf, it will be justifiable, measure for measure, for the pursued to collect the plunder of their pursuers. Such is the custom in any war.

RABBI DAVID TZVI HOFFMAN

Because the plan for Israel's escape involved telling the Egyptians that the people were only leaving for a three-day furlough to sacrifice to God, the nation would necessarily have to leave a good deal of their possessions behind. To compensate the Israelites for that impending loss [for they were never to return to reclaim their property], the LORD promised the nation that they would not quit Egypt empty handed. In exchange for their homes and the articles they would be unable to take with them, the nation would be given “objects of silver and gold.” These are the items that they would ask from the Egyptians before the exodus.

QUESTIONS FOR THOUGHT

- Which of the commentaries suggests that initially they were supposed to borrow the gold and silver? Why does he think that that is not ethically problematic?
- Which of the commentaries understands that the plan was for them to request parting gifts from the Egyptians?
- According to Rabbi David Tzvi Hoffman, it was a justified deception. What made it justified?
- Which of the above explanations do you find the least ethically uncomfortable? The most?

חמישי

אֲבֹתֵיכֶם אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם אֱלֹהֵי יִצְחָק וְאֱלֹהֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁלַחְנִי
 טז אֵלֵיכֶם זֶה-שְׁמִי לְעֹלָם וְזֶה זִכְרִי לְדֹר דָּר: לֵךְ וְאִסַּפְתָּ אֶת-
 זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹתֵיכֶם נֹרְאָה אֵלֵי
 אֱלֹהֵי אֲבֹרָהֶם יִצְחָק וַיַּעֲקֹב לֵאמֹר פִּקֹּד פְּקֹדֹתַי אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת-
 יז הָעָשׂוּי לָכֶם בְּמִצְרַיִם: וְאָמַר אֵלֶּהָ אֶתְכֶם מֵעַנִי מִצְרַיִם אֶל-
 אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַפְּרִזִּי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֶל-אֶרֶץ
 יח זְבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: וּשְׁמָעוּ לְקֹלְךָ וּבֵאתָ אֵתָּהּ וְזִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
 אֶל-מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם וְאָמַרְתָּם אֵלָיו יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי הָעִבְרִיִּים נִקְרָה
 עָלֵינוּ וְעַתָּה נֵלְכֶה-נָּא דֶרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים בְּמִדְבָּר וְנִזְבְּחָהּ
 טט לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ: וְאֲנִי יָדַעְתִּי כִּי לֹא-יִתֵּן אֶתְכֶם מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
 כ לְהֵלֶךְ וְלֹא בְיַד חֲזָקָה: וּשְׁלַחְתִּי אֶת-יָדִי וְהִבִּיתִי אֶת-מִצְרַיִם
 כא בְּכָל נִפְלְאוֹתַי אֲשֶׁר אַעֲשֶׂה בְּקִרְבּוֹ וְאַחֲרֵי-כֵן יִשְׁלַח אֶתְכֶם:
 כב וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-חֵן הָעַם-הַזֶּה בְּעֵינֵי מִצְרַיִם וְהָיָה כִּי תֵלְכוּן לֹא
 תֵלְכוּ רִיקָם: וּשְׁאַלְהָ אִשָּׁה מִשְׁכַּנְתָּהּ וּמִגֵּרַת בֵּיתָהּ כְּלֵי-כֶסֶף

TEXTUAL SKILLS

1. The Torah speaks about requesting items from Egyptian neighbors or people who live in the same house. What does this suggest about the slavery in Egypt?
2. There is another place where God instructs *Benei Yisrael* to ask the Egyptians for their things, in Exodus 11:2. What are the differences between that verse and this one?

CLASSIC COMMENTATORS

God tells Moshe to instruct *Benei Yisrael* to request items of gold and silver, and even clothes, from their Egyptian neighbors before they leave on their three-day journey. This raises serious ethical questions about deceiving the Egyptians (since they were not planning to return those items). The commentaries grapple with this question.

רשב"ם RASHBAM

במתנה גמורה וחלוטה, שהריא ונתתני את חן העם (שמות ג, כ"א). As a genuine and unconditional gift, for "I will grant this people favor [in the eyes of the Egyptians]" (3:21).