



TORAH WEEKLY

15 - 21 January, 2017

17 - 23 Teves, 5777

Exodus 1:1 -6:1

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Parshat Shemot

I Shall Be

In this week's Torah reading, Moses makes his dramatic appearance on the Biblical scene. He tries to stop the persecution of his brethren, receives a death sentence for his troubles, and is forced to flee to Midian where he marries Zipporah and tends the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. Then, at the burning bush, comes his first divine revelation.

G-d calls upon the shepherd to go back to Egypt and redeem his people. The mission is nothing less than to face up to the Pharaoh himself and deliver the L-rd's famous stirring message: Let My People Go!

In characteristic humility, Moses is a most reluctant leader. He seems to be looking for all sorts of reasons as to why he is unworthy of the task. At one point, he asks the Almighty, "Who shall I say sent me? What is Your name?"

Now we are familiar with many names that G-d goes by, but the one G-d now gives Moses is puzzling and enigmatic, mysterious and mystical "I shall be as I shall be." Strange name for a Supreme Being.

Many commentaries expound on the possible interpretations of this most unusual name. Here is one very powerful

explanation.

The significance of this name is that it is posed in the future tense. "I shall be as I shall be." Moses was asking the ultimate existential question. How do I call You, G-d? "What is Your name," means how are You to be identified, known, understood? How can finite, mortal man come to know the Infinite Being?

And G-d's answer is, "I shall be as I shall be" -- future tense. You want to know me, Moses? I'm afraid you'll have to wait. We cannot necessarily understand G-d by what has happened in the past. Nor, even, in the present. In the here and now, when we stare life and its ambiguities in the face, we experience tremendous difficulty in our vain attempts to grasp the Almighty's vision or perceive His vast eternal plan.

To truly understand the Infinite G-d takes infinite patience. One day, somewhere down the line, in the future, He will make Himself known to us. Only then will we come to really know Him and His inscrutable ways. "I shall be as I shall be."

Don't we all ask Moses' question at times? Why is there tragedy in the world? Why is there so much human suffering, pain and agony, so much tzorris to contend with? How many families have been torn

apart literally and figuratively in Israel in the four year Intifada? How many individuals do we each know in our own communities who have experienced tragedy in their lives? Why, we cry, why?

So we are told that right at the very beginning of Jewish history, the very first time G-d spoke to Moses He said to him up front, "I know you want to be able to understand Me and My ways; but please

"I know you want to be able to understand Me and My ways; but please accept that it is impossible -- for now."

accept that it is impossible -- for now." I shall be as I shall be. One day, you will be able to know Me. Not today or tomorrow, but one day in the future everything will make sense and everything will be understood. Ultimately, in time, all will be known.

In the meanwhile, we live with faith, trust, hope, and a great deal of patience as we see destiny unfolding and we aren't quite sure what to make of it. And we look forward with eager anticipation to that awesome day when the Almighty's great name will be known and understood, and we will see with our own eyes of flesh that G-d is good and

His ways are just. May it be speedily in our day.

By Rabbi Yossy Goldman

Freud's Great Freudian Slip

It was Freud's greatest Freudian slip, and for some reason his commentators, at least those I've read, haven't noticed it.

It appears in his last book, *Moses and Monotheism*, a strange work if ever there was one. It was published in 1939, by which time Freud had taken refuge in Britain. Had he stayed in Vienna, heaven knows what humiliations he would have suffered before being murdered along with his fellow Jews. For some reason, at this desperate time, Freud wrote a book (he originally described it as a "historical novel") in which he tried to prove that Moses was an Egyptian. There have been many speculations as to why he wrote it, and I have no wish to add to their number. Early on in the book, though, there is a most curious episode.

Freud notes that several scholars have identified a common theme in stories about the childhood of heroes. The hero's birth is fraught with danger. As a baby, he is exposed to the elements in a way that would normally lead to death -- sometimes by being placed in a box and thrown into the water. The child is rescued and brought up by adoptive parents. Eventually, he discovers his true identity. It is a story told about Sargon, Gilgamesh, Oedipus, Romulus and many others. It is also the story of Moses.

At this point, however, Freud notes that in one respect the story of Moses isn't like the others at all. In fact, it's the opposite. In the conventional story, the hero's adoptive parents are humble, ordinary people. Eventually he discovers that he is actually of royal blood, a prince. In the Moses story, the reverse is the case. It is his adoptive family that is royal. He is brought up by the daughter of Pharaoh. His true identity, he discovers, is that he belongs, by birth, to a nation of slaves.

Freud saw this and then failed to see what it meant. Instead he changed tack and concluded that the story is a fabrication designed to conceal the fact that Moses was the son of Pharaoh's daughter; he really was a prince of Egypt. What Freud failed to realize is that the story of Moses is not a myth but an anti-myth. It takes a myth and turns it upside down.

Its message is simple and revolutionary. True royalty -- the Bible suggests -- is the opposite of our conventional wisdom. It isn't privilege and wealth, splendor and palaces. It's moral courage. Moses, in discovering that he is the child of slaves, finds greatness. It's not power that matters,

but the fight for justice and freedom. Had Moses been an Egyptian prince, he would have been eminently forgettable. Only by being true to his people and to G-d did he become a hero.

Freud had mixed feelings about his own identity. He admired Jews but was tone-deaf to the music of Judaism. That is why, I suspect, he failed to see that he had come face to face with one of the most powerful moral truths the Bible ever taught. Those whom the world despises, G-d loves. A child of slaves can be greater than a prince. G-d's standards are not power and privilege. They are about recognizing G-d's image in the weak, the powerless, the afflicted, the suffering, and fighting for their cause. What a message of courage Freud might have sent his people in that dark night! Let us at least see what he did not, that the story of Moses is one of the great narratives of hope in the literature of mankind.

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

*Former Chief Rabbi of Great Britain and the British
Commonwealth.*

In Jewish History

Tuesday, 5 Tevet, 5777 - January 3, 2017

1st NY Synagogue (1728)

In 1684, a group of Spanish and Portuguese Jews who fled the Inquisition (see "Today in Jewish History" for Tevet 22) held a Rosh Hashanah service in New Amsterdam, thereby founding congregation Shearith Israel ("Remnant of Israel"). On this 17th of Tevet in 1728, the congregation purchased a lot in Lower Manhattan to erect the first synagogue in New York.

Toldot Aaron (1754)

Rabbi Aaron Zelig ben Joel Feivush of Ostrog, Russia, author of *Toldot Aaron*, passed away on Tevet 17 of the year in 5515 from creation (1754).

Maggid of Dubne (1841)

Tevet 17 is also the yahrtzeit of Rabbi Yaakov Wolf Krantz (1740-1804), the Maggid (itinerant preacher) of Dubna, particularly known for the parables (meshalim) he employed in his sermons and writings.