

PARSHAS SHEMOS



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DO YOU HAVE YIRAS SHAMAYIM?



THE PRAISE OF THE MEYALDOS

This *parsha* begins with the episode of the *meyaldos* in *Mitzrayim*, their righteousness, and the wickedness of the Egyptians.

The *melech* of *Mitzrayim* called to the *meyaldos ha'Ivriyos*, Jewish midwives, one named *Shifra* and one named *Puah*. *Va'yomer*, and *Pharaoh* said to them, בילדן את העבריות, "When you go to help the *Ivriyos* give birth," וראיתן על האבנים, "look at the birth stool" (Shemos 1:16). They used to sit on a special stool when giving birth. אמר בן הוא והמיתן אותו, "If you see it's a boy, you should kill him," ואם בת היא וחייה, "and if it's a girl, let her live." It means *Pharaoh* was only concerned with the males, not to keep them alive. The *nekeivos* he didn't care about.

Because his astrologers told him that a child will be born from the Jewish nation and he will take the Jewish nation out of *Mitzrayim*. He didn't know who that child was, so he decided to kill out all the males. The Torah tells us: ותיראן, "and the midwives feared Hashem," ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן מלך מצרים, "and they did not do what the king of Egypt had told them"; ותחיינן את הילדים, "and they kept the children alive." (v. 17)

It's interesting, it doesn't say *they didn't kill the children*. That's what you would have expected it to say. They didn't listen to *Pharaoh*, and they didn't kill them. It says ותחיינן.

T'chayena means they did much more than not kill them, but rather they assisted, they made efforts to assist, to make them healthier, to make them better. *Chazal* say in *Masechta Sota (11b)*: How did they do that? So *Chazal* tell us they would hide them in their homes. Number one: They provided a hiding place for them. And they also fed them and they undertook to raise them. That is something that's amazing.¹

Now, if somebody would ask what was the greatness of the actions of the *meyaldos*? What would you say? What was their greatness? The greatness is that they didn't kill them, *pashtus*.

When *Pharaoh* tells you to do something, you don't argue with *Pharaoh*. *Pharaoh* is not somebody you argue with, unless you want to lose that pimple that's on your shoulders. But they didn't listen to *Pharaoh*. The *pasuk*, however, does not emphasize that. Why doesn't the *pasuk* say that? That's question number one. Instead, the *pasuk* emphasizes their praise: ותראן המילדות את האלקים, "and the midwives feared Hashem."

WHAT DRIVES OUR CHOICES?

Rav Eliyahu Meir Bloch (1894-1955), the Telzer Rosh Yeshivah, adds another question, a Telzer type of question. He says, *lechora*, what is the great *chashivus* that they didn't kill the children? Innocent children who had done nothing wrong. Do you think it's easy for simple people to kill children and snuff out their lives? We could expect that even people who are on a much lower level would be unable to kill children. In the Holocaust, there were all kinds of stories where the Germans tried to make mothers and other people kill Jewish children. They couldn't do it. They didn't have the heart to do it.

So then what was the greatness of the actions of the *meyaldos*? All the *gedolim* reached the same conclusion: They said that the greatness was not that they didn't kill the children, that wasn't their greatness. You know what their greatness was? That they were more afraid of Hashem than they were of *Pharaoh*.

They could have had no qualms in killing these children. If they would have had to kill the children *al pi halacha* - if the *halacha* would have dictated to kill them, "Kill this child to save your life" - if it were *pikuach nefesh*, they would have done it. The only reason they didn't do it was because they were *yarei Hashem*. Their actions came about from *yiras Hashem*, not from some emotional response that you find by other people in the world.

Other people in the world could also manage to not kill somebody, but not because of *yiras Hashem*. It's because of their emotions. When a *ma'aseh*, when an action, emanates from the inner depth of a human being because of *yiras Shamayim*, that's called greatness. You know why? Because when something comes from *yiras Shamayim*, that's the guarantee that you're dealing with a great person. But when somebody is not motivated because of *yiras Shamayim*, then they're motivated because "Ach! I can't kill somebody. I could never kill somebody, innocent children, I can't kill anybody." That kind of feeling can be overcome and there's no guarantee that they won't end up being murderers.

¹ ותחיינן - הוה ליה למיכתב ולא המיתו הילדים ותחיינן משמע שהיו מסייעין להחיותן שהיו טומנות אותן בבתיהן ומגדלות אותם (רש"י)

Many people during World War II became murderers. Many people became Kapos and committed murder. Unbelievable. And I read many stories about people who were put into that situation. I feel terrible for them. They were told, "Either kill or be killed," and they succumbed.

Over here, in Mitzrayim, they could have made a *shtick*. There might have been a lot of children that were not healthy. They could have killed the unhealthy children. Or they could have come up with a different *aitzah*. That's what you do if you're coming from an emotional viewpoint. They could have recused themselves and said, "We are recusing ourselves from this position." You think there weren't other people who could have been midwives? Is midwifery such a genius business that you have to be *mamash* Shifra and Puah? But they didn't do that. They didn't try to get out dealing with *Pharaoh*. They stayed on the job and they did what Hashem wanted them to do.

By comparison, there are many stories that took place during World War II of great doctors and others that did terrible, terrible things to innocent people. That's because there wasn't *yiras Shamayim*. The decision of what was right to do was emotional, and they convinced themselves that Jews were swine and subhuman. They fell into the *narishkeit* that they were told, and the outcome was that they stooped to murder.

THE REWARD IS EQUAL TO THE INTENSITY OF THE CHALLENGE

Now, Reb Yerucham says that this is something for us to look into in our actions. We have to analyze: Is there anything that we do because of *yiras Hashem*? Ask yourself: Is there any *aveira* that you would like to do but you don't do because of *yiras Elokim*? Now, there might be some actions that a person does not do because he's afraid of the punishment that Hashem will bring upon him.

In my lifetime, I've seen people who wanted to do *aveiros*, but they made a *cheshbon* that the price they were going to pay was too high, so it wasn't worth it. But let's say a person is not afraid of the *onesh*. Is there anybody that's afraid of transgressing the commandment of Hashem? I don't know. That's a tall order.

Now you may ask, what's the difference? If I don't murder people, does it make a difference whether I don't murder people because *Hashem* said not to, or I don't murder people because I'm afraid that I'm going to get terribly punished? Does it make a difference why you don't do it? And the answer is yes. If you don't murder somebody for your own personal, emotional reasons, you're not entitled to any *schar* for that action, or for the non-action. You're not preserving life because you are concerned about what Hashem has to say. All you're concerned about is your emotions. "I don't have it in me to hurt somebody. I don't have it in me to murder somebody." If so, you're not going to get any *schar* for that.

Have you ever walked past a bank and thought how you could rob this bank? I think most people haven't thought about that. But I remember thinking about it, and asking myself whether the reason why I don't rob this bank is only because I don't know how to rob the bank. I remember shaking bank doors. They don't shake. Bank doors are very strong doors. When the bank is closed no one can go in. On the corner of my block we had a bank. I remember walking around the bank. I wanted to see if there were any weak spots. There were no weak spots. The back doors were also solid doors. I remember thinking, "Now I know why people don't rob banks." But then I read that mostly, banks are not robbed at night.

Banks are robbed when they're open for business, which is unusual. Homes are generally robbed by night, when people are sleeping. Robbers don't like people who are awake in their homes. So why do they rob banks in the daytime then? Is it because they are *tzaddikim*? Because they have *yiras shamayim*? Because they have no "*emunascha balaylos*"? No. The reason is because at night they don't know how to get into the bank. And if they stick a gun to the window by night, no one's gonna care. But if you come during the day with a gun, even a plastic gun, or even a note "I'm carrying a bomb, give me the money or else," at least there's somebody to talk to.

Now, most people have no interest in robbing banks, and they're too afraid to rob banks. So when they come to *Shamayim*, they shouldn't think that they're going to get *schar* for that, because it never came across their radar to rob a bank. *Schar* is only given לפום צערא אגרא - only for the difficulties and the challenges you faced and overcame. And that's why it's amazing to me: The Torah testifies - and no one else but the Torah could have testified to this - that the only reason Shifra and Puah did not murder these kids was because of *yiras Hashem*. Everything they did was because *Hashem* said "Thou shalt not murder." And they were more concerned about what Hashem said than what Pharaoh said. They looked at *Pharaoh* like a zero, like a nobody. Now, do you think it was an easy challenge? No. If it would have been an easy challenge, they wouldn't have gotten such a massive *schar* for it!

They received a massive *schar* for this challenge. You know what they received for this? They got *battei kehuna*, *battei leviyah*, and *battei malchus*. Now, can you imagine getting such a reward? You know what that means? That the challenge must have been a tremendous challenge for them. We understand this by using the rule of לפום צערא אגרא.

I'm trying to imagine this: They received this order from *Pharaoh*, and now they're thinking to themselves "*Should we... ?*" They didn't just say "Forget about it. Let's go home and make a *kiddush*. We're not doing this." They didn't say that. They struggled. And they struggled. And they didn't say: "How can we kill innocent *shaifelech*, innocent *kinderlach*?! Such sweet *kinderlach*! How could we do that?!" They didn't say that. You know what they said? They said, "*Hakadosh Baruch Hu* says no!" But the *Yetzer Hara* came back and said, "*Pikuach nefesh! Chayecha kodmim!*" All kinds of *ta'anos*.

And it was a tremendous, tremendous challenge for them. They had to strengthen their *yiras Shamayim*. Most of us, if we ever face a challenge about doing an *aveira*, we have very little *yiras Shamayim*. We say, "Okay, *yiras Shamayim*, okay. But I want to do an *aveira*, so that comes first." But here, they strengthened themselves. They were *mechazek* the *yiras Shamayim*.

I'm picturing them in their home, in a little, dark place, thinking this decree over, actually discussing it. And they're reaching a decision: "We're not going to do it. Hashem doesn't want this to be done, so we're not going to do it." When I think about it, it's mind-boggling. The *schar* they received is an indication of what level of *yiras Hashem* they reached.

DEVELOPING YIRAS HASHEM IS A MITZVAH

Now you have to know the main *mitzvah* of *yiras Hashem* that the *Torah* gave us is to develop and build it inside ourselves. It's a *mitzvah* to have *yiras Hashem*.² It's a very difficult *mitzvah* because there's no action in the *mitzvah*. It's something that goes on inside your *nefesh*. *Mitzvos* generally involve doing actions. The way you're *mekayem* this *mitzvah* is by working on acquiring it, by making *hishtadlus* to acquire it - that is actually fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

So here's a person walking in the street and he's *shomer* his *einayim*, he guards his eyes. But you know why he's *shomer* his *einayim*? Because he heard that if you're not *shomer* your *einayim*, you're gonna end up getting cataracts and going blind. So he's afraid of going blind. So he doesn't give in to his *yetzer hara*. But a person has to understand that you have to prepare your mind to be able to do the *mitzvah* in the right way.

You have to do exercises as part of the preparation: You have to think about *yiras Hashem*. *Rabbeinu Yonah* in *Shaarei Teshuva* writes: *כי האדם חייב להכין מערכי ליבו* - a person has to prepare his mental thought process at all times in order to instill in himself awe and fear of Hashem's presence.³

Now, if you're *chayav* to do that - and you are *chayav m'doraysa* to do that; that's the *mitzvas asei* - so Hashem is going to tell us: how come you never worked on acquiring *yiras Hashem*?

It's possible that two people will do a *mitzva*, and one will get very little *schar* or no *schar*, and one will get a lot of *schar* for himself and his children. It all depends on what was going on in his mind. What was in his mind? Here's a person that decided to sit in *yeshiva* and learn *Torah* and commit himself. There's another person that decided he's going to do something. Not because his wife was bothering him about it, not because he had peer pressure, but because he understood this was the right thing to do and this is the *ratzon Hashem*.

That's the difference, *rabbosai*. The *Gemara* says that: *Yiras Hashem* is *chochma*.⁴ It's not emotion, it's *chochma*. You know why? Because *yiras Hashem* means awareness of Hashem. If you would feel that Hashem is present in your life, your awareness of Him would be on a different level. And that is something we have to work on. Because you don't want to go through your entire life never having undertaken to think about, or to try to gain, some *yiras Hashem* with your mind, to use and employ your *chochma*. *הן יראת השם היא חכמה*.⁵

BEING IN AWE OF PEOPLE IS A TOOL

What's the *chochma*? The *chochma* is to become aware of the fact that Hashem is watching you.

I remember having that feeling in the presence of *gedolim*. I remember being in the presence of the Steipler and thinking that I could not even have a *hava amina* to commit a sin in his presence. I felt a deep sense of awe in the presence of my *rebbe* (R' Meir Halevi Soloveichik). I would be very embarrassed to misbehave - because of the awe. And I used to ask myself, how come I'm not in awe of Hashem? And the answer is, because I didn't have the *chochma* of that awareness. I feel my *rebbe's* presence when I'm at his house, but when I leave his house, when I can't see him anymore, I feel like I'm on my own. So if I don't see Hashem here, I also feel like I'm on my own and I have a certain degree of independence. In that *matzav* you only think of consequences: will the sin hurt or will it not hurt? But the awareness that Hashem is watching you - that's something you don't consider.

I remember inviting people to go to *gedolim* with me. They said, "Sorry, we can't go." I said, "Why not? It's an opportunity of a lifetime." They said, "To be honest with you, I'm afraid he could see through me. If he sees me, he'll see that I'm a bad guy, I'm finished. He knows what I do. Who knows, maybe he'll lose it on me." So that's fear. That's not *yiras Shamayim*. That's not awareness.

²רמב"ם הלכות יסודי התורה ב אב: "האל הנכבד והנורא הזה, מצוה לאוהבו וליראה ממנו שנאמר: "ואהבת את ה' אלוהיך", ונאמר: "את ה' אלוהיך תירא" (דברים יג, י כ). והיאך היא הדרך לאהבתו ויראתו? בשעה שיתבונן האדם במעשיו וברואיו הנפלאים הגדולים, ויראה מהם חכמתו שאין לה ערך ולא קץ, מיד הוא אוהב ומשבח ומפאר ומתאוה ומתאוה גדולה לידע השם הגדול, כמו שאמר דוד: "צמאה נפשי אלוהים לקל חי" (תהלים מב ג). וכשמחשב בדברים האלו עצמן, מיד הוא נרתע לאחוריו, וירא ויפחד ויידע שהוא בריה קטנה שפלה אפלה, עומד בדעת קלה מעוטה לפני תמים דעות, כמו שאמר דוד: "כי אראה שמיך... מה אנוש כי תזכרנו" (תהלים ח ד-ה). ולפי הדברים האלו אני מבאר כללים גדולים ממעשה ריבון העולמים, כדי שיהיה פתח למבין לאהוב את השם, כמו שאמר החכמים בענין אהבה, שמתוך כך אתה מכיר את מי שאמר והיה העולם.

³ שערי תשובה ג, קסד: "והשני - כי האדם חייב להכין מערכי לב בכל עת ולהשכין בלבו אימה ויראה מעל פני הש"י. ועל הרשעים נאמר (ירמיה ח) ולא אמרו בלבבם נירא נא את ה' אלהינו וכו' "

⁴ שבת לא: "א"ר יוחנן משום ר' אלעזר אין לו להקב"ה בעולמו אלא יראת שמים בלבד שנאמר (דברים י"ב) 'ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלהיך שואל מעמך כי אם ליראה וגו' וכתוב (איוב כח כב) 'ויאמר לאדם

הן יראת ה' היא חכמה וגו' " שכן בלשון יוני קורין לאחת הן וכו' "

⁵ איוב כח כב

I remember being in the presence of Rav Chaim Kanievsky and Rav Shach and not being afraid at all that they were going to do something to me. But what you do feel in their presence is awe. And in their presence, you feel, “I want to do the right thing. I want to behave.” This is something that we have to try to attain with Hashem by having thoughts of *yiras Shamayim*. These are tremendous thoughts.

And the thoughts are what the *schar* is given for. The reason is: You are working against your grain to try to build your awareness, and for that, *Hashem* gives *schar*. What if you acquire some of this awareness? It is tremendous if you acquire some of the awareness of *yiras Hashem*!

OUR GOAL: YIRAS SHAMAYIM

Some people are afraid to be *mechalel Shabbos*, but not necessarily because they’re afraid of a punishment. They behave this way because they feel *Shabbos* is a holy thing, they don’t want to desecrate *Shabbos*. They are aware of Hashem: When *Hashem* says, “Don’t do this,” it means you don’t do this, that’s how real it is to them.

Yiras Hashem is a *chochma*. You see how *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* shows us the tremendous *chochma* and emphasizes the tremendous accomplishments of the *meyaldos* in actively developing their *yiras Shamayim*. Let us try to think about this so we too can acquire the awareness, at least sometimes, that *Hashem* is present with us always. And that will be a tremendous *zechus* for us to be *zoiche* to a lot of *tov*.

IN CONCLUSION

The *meyaldos*, Shifra and Puah, stood up to Pharaoh and did not carry out his evil plan. The only way they could do this was by fearing Hashem. *Yiras Hashem* is a *chochma*. It does not come from an emotional feeling of what is right or wrong, which is driven by our understanding of what the consequences will be and what is comfortable for us. Instead, by understanding with *chochma* what Hashem says is the right thing to do, we can keep to the core values of the Torah and not be swayed to do evil. The Torah is our resource to know what is the right thing to do. *Yiras Shamayim* is a *mitzvah* and it’s something we must work on and develop. Having thoughts of *yiras Shamayim* is the active fulfillment of this *mitzvah* and that is what the *schar* is given for. Our goal in *avodas Hashem* is to develop and acquire awareness of *yiras Hashem*. This week (*bli neder*) I will try to develop real *yiras Shamayim*, such as by sensing awe when I am in the presence of *gedolei Yisrael*, by thinking about why I am not *mechalel Shabbos*, or by reminding myself that I do not do *aveiros* because the Torah says not to do them.