

# Va'era: Hope IN Despair

- Nisson Shulman.

The Torah pauses at the lowest point in the story of Egypt, to give Miriam's lesson of hope to Amram and Yocheved. Jean Kirkpatrick's despair at the UN, contrasted with Yehuda Blum: "Frustration is always a function of expectations". Translate this to Moshe's lowest point, "Meaz bati el Paroah hareota laam haze. Hashem teaches Moshe this lesson.

Va'era: Hope IN Despair  
(26 December 2001)  
by Rabbi Nisson Shulman

Vayikach amram et yocheved dodato lo leisha, vateled lo et Aharon veet Moshe.

In Chapter 6 the Torah pauses at the lowest, most hopeless part of the story of Egypt's enslavement, when it appears that Moshe's cause is lost, and offers the genealogy of Moshe and Aharon. In that statement of yihus we read the names of Moshe's parents.

This is not the first time Moshe's parents are introduced. In Chapter 2 of Shemot we read, Vayelech ish mibet Levi vayikach et bat Levi.

Why were Moshe's parents first introduced anonymously, and only now, reintroduced by name, Amram and Yocheved? It would be thought that if their names are important, we should learn them right at the beginning?

I suggest the answer holds an important lesson for all Jews today.

I once saw a comment by the then Ambassador Jean Kirkpatrick about her service in the United Nations. She had been one year on the job at the time, and a major newspaper published an interview with her. The paper stated that after a year on the job, Jean Kirkpatrick acknowledged that she was frequently frustrated, but as yet had no plans to resign. A day later, I was present at a Rabbinical Council Conference, and a special guest was the Israeli Ambassador to the UN at that time, Yehuda Blum. In casual conversation around a luncheon table, we asked him a similar question; In view of Mrs. Kirkpatrick's feeling, how does the Ambassador of the State of Israel survive so honourably and well, in his role at the United Nations? After all, if there is frustration, his must be far greater?

His answer was: "Frustration and disillusion are always a function of expectations. And since my expectations were not particularly high in the first place, I do not feel frustrated and disillusioned. Among friends let me add, that given the collective background as a Jew, and to some extent as somebody who grew up in Europe during World War II, I have no undue expectations from the Gentile world. And that too, to some extent, immunizes a person like myself from this continuous onslaught against Israel and the Jewish people at the UN."

There was a time when we thought such frustrations were subsiding for our people. And then

came the Durban abuse, actually a verbal pogrom, and we saw that nothing is really new. The peace negotiations we had all hoped at one time might be fruitful are beyond the limits of frustration, they are non-existent. And if we can view the events of the current period of time with any hope at all, it is only that other nations are feeling the hardship and horror of the constant terrorism that we have experienced for so long.

But if we continue without euphoric expectations, we can perhaps gain some of the wisdom Yehuda Blum then shared with us. For no matter how difficult, we must do our best. And we must trust in the Almighty for the rest. We may never give up. Nor can we afford the luxury of tiredness or frustration.

Now let us return to our question. Why did the Torah wait with the names of Moshe's parents until the second time they were introduced?

I said before, this was the lowest point in our saga. Moshe himself was ready to give up. From the moment of his return to Egypt, things had gotten progressively worse, until finally, the Jews had to make their quota of bricks without straw. Moshe vented his frustration, even rage, in his bitter words, Meaz bati el parah, hareota laam haze. "O God, from the moment I appeared before Pharaoh, you have made things worse, not better, for this people!"

Perhaps Moshe saw this coming. Perhaps that is why he changed the message that God wanted them freed to the more modest request of a three-day holiday in the desert. Perhaps Moshe himself was anticipating the frustration, and limiting the expectations so that the disappointment be smaller.

Be that as it may, the Almighty proceeds to teach Moshe a lesson that must be learned by him as our leader and by all our people for all time. And so the narrative interrupts. And part of the interruption reminds Moses of his parents and how he was born. How Amram and Yocheved had previously been married to each other. They had two children in that earlier time, Miriam and Aharon. But then came Pharaoh's decree that all boys born be thrown into the Nile. Whereupon Amram and Yocheved separated, as did many other Jews, in order not to bring children into the world.

At that point Miriam pleaded with them, saying, Amram's decree is worse than Pharaoh's! Pharaoh wanted to eliminate male children, and Amram's action would eliminate all Jewish children, girls as well. So Amram and Yocheved listened to their daughter and remarried. And Moshe was born in secret. The parents hid their parenthood till the boy could no longer be hidden. You know the story. How he was hidden in the rushes, found and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. The man destined to save our people, saved by a miracle.

Who had more reason for hopelessness than Amram and his generation? Who had more reason for despair, to give up the fight? Yet they would not do so. And that anonymous, hidden reunion of that earlier time, caused you, Moshe to be born, and you will bring out this people. You too may not give up. You too, have no right to be frustrated. From Pharaoh, expect nothing. But from God Almighty, expect geulah veyeshuah! And it will happen! Get up Moshe, and do your job. Now it shall be seen that it is I that sends you. Now my wonders shall be manifest. Now the

people shall be redeemed. And the anonymous act of the man and woman of the tribe of Levi shall be seen as having made all the difference between slavery and freedom. Now it is time to introduce the real heroes of the redemption; Amram and Yocheved, who heeded Miriam and would continue to try their best even when all else failed. Now they shall be known by name as the people responsible for the birth of Moses.

We are no longer looking through rose-colored glasses at the world around us. Israel has awakened to the dangers long ago, and now the United States has awakened to danger from without and within similar to ours. We have other concerns too, the ever-growing intermarriage rate, Yeshiva dropouts are also our concern, indifference; assimilation. New anti-Semitism is also a concern.

We had far greater difficulties in the past. We were able to survive them with courage because of the hope and courage born from such messages as we learn from the names of Moshe's parents. We need such lessons for our times. With hope, courage, with constant effort to bring the message of Jews and of Israel to the world, and with reliance on the Ribono Shel Olam, the geulah veyeshuah will surely come. May it be soon.

\*\*\*\*\*