

A PARASHA THOUGHT

What Was She Thinking?!

RABBI ADI ROLAND  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

There is a famous Medrash in this week's *parasha* (from the Gemara *Sotah* 12b) that every child in school knows. When Basyah, the daughter of Paraoth, saw baby Moshe in the basket and couldn't reach him Hashem made a *nes* (miracle) and caused her hand to stretch out and bring the basket to her. When we get older and analyze this Medrash, however, there are several perplexing questions: What in the world was Basyah thinking when she stretched out her hand? The *posuk* clearly indicates that she first reached out her hand prior to it becoming stretched out. If the basket was clearly not within reach, why did she even attempt to reach it? Furthermore, why did Hashem make a *nes* for her? If it was in order to save Moshe, couldn't there have been other, more natural ways that Hashem could've caused the basket to drift closer to her? Was it really necessary to break the laws of nature to have her arm stretch out?

I think if we look at what else the aforementioned Gemara tells us about this incident we can better understand the depth of the Medrash and the lessons it's trying to tell us. Firstly, the Medrash addresses why Basyah was going down to wash by the river. One would think the daughter of the king would have her own bathhouse in which to bathe rather than going down to the river like a commoner. The Gemara answers that she was going there to immerse in the river's water for conversion purposes; she was going to leave behind her idol-worshiping upbringing and become part of Bnei Yisrael. One can only imagine how much

it took for her to decide this! She was surely taught and brought up her whole life how to treat and view the nation that her father was subjugating; they were no better than animals and deserved to be treated as such. And yet, she overcame her education and upbringing and converted to become part of this lowly slave-nation, being able to see past their current situation and discover their glorious past and potential for future greatness. This is truly an amazing action on Basyah's part. After deciding to convert, and in the middle of her actual conversion(!), she sees a basket with a Jewish baby boy in it. Her whole being is screaming to her to kill him or, at the very least, ignore him, per her father's directive. In fact, the Gemara adds that the maidservants who were with her at the time protested against her actions, stating that even if everyone else ignores the king's decree to kill the Jewish baby boys, at the very least the king's own family members, and for sure the king's own daughter, should fulfill the king's edicts. Realizing that this baby boy is out of reach, it would be the simplest thing for her to just ignore him and continue with her life. Yet, as she is battling with both her inner thoughts and her maidservants' protests, she decides to persevere, and is more determined than ever to leave behind her past and turn a fresh page towards her future. She decides to reach out her hand, knowing full well that even though she won't be able to save the baby because he was out of reach, she has a fierce determination to change the feelings and education she grew up with in order

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THE RABBI WAS ASKED  
ON THE PARASHA

THIS WEEK WITH  
RABBI YITZCHAK PREIS

Shemos

**Q.** The *parasha* includes a story wherein Moshe looks to make sure no one is watching and, after determining that 'the coast is clear,' kills a cruel Egyptian taskmaster. But this story is immediately followed by Moshe breaking up a fight only to be accosted by one of the assailants, who says, "Are you going to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?"

Apparently, there were witnesses to the first story! What went wrong?

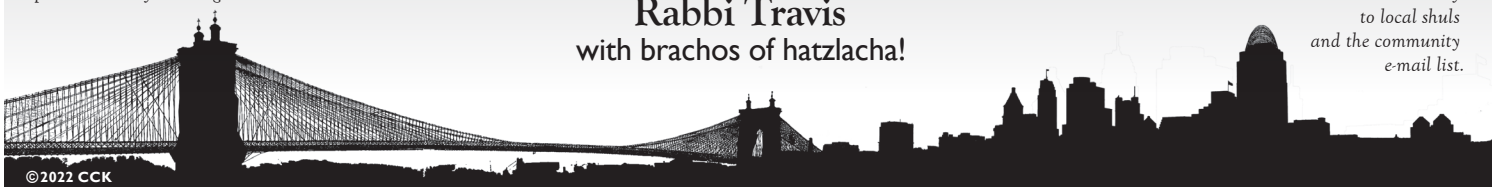
**A.** Rav Yakov Kamenetsky understands that your question is exactly what yielded Rashi's understanding of "...and he saw there was no man." Rashi explains that Moshe was not 'scouting out the scene' but was looking prophetically into the potential destiny of the taskmaster. Moshe wanted to ascertain that this taskmaster was not destined to have any progeny that should preclude his life coming to an end at this juncture. Although human courts don't operate this way, the Heavenly Court takes all such factors into consideration. And Moshe was utilizing a "Heavenly Court" system according to those who understand

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## THE RABBI WAS ASKED ON THE PARASHA

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that Moshe used a Divine Name to bring about the death.

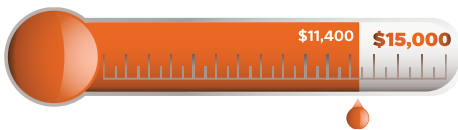
Interestingly, the way the Netziv learns this *parasha*, the question doesn't get off the ground. He suggests that Moshe was not trying to determine that there were no witnesses, but he was looking side to side to seek anyone who might assist in bringing the taskmaster to justice. After determining that no one would play that role, he took action. 🕒

Something always bugged you about the upcoming *parasha* (or last week's)? Ask! Submit a question on the *parasha* by Monday at noon by emailing [parasha@cincykollel.org](mailto:parasha@cincykollel.org). Questions will be selected to address at the discretion of the Rabbi who is answering that week. Questions may be edited for brevity/clarity.



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## HAFTORAH HAPPENINGS

RABBI YAAKOV MARCHUK

This Shabbos we begin *parshas Shemos*. The Ramban, in his introduction to the book of *Shemos*, explains that the book of *Bereshis* is the foundation of the world and the creation of the Jewish people, and just like in the formation of the embryo, which will eventually be a full-formed adult, there already exists the DNA with in it, so to within the *Avos* already exists all the future happenings of the Jewish people. *Shemos* is when the seeds that were sowed become a nation, and the people go from slaves in Egypt to return to the level of their fathers, receiving the Torah and building the *mishkan*. Similarly, in our *haftarah* Yeshaya reiterates a theme, of challenge and eventual redemption. In chapter 28 verse 9 the *Navi* bemoaned "To whom shall one teach knowledge?" – only to people who have not yet turned to wickedness, those young children who are just old enough to eat on their own, who no longer need their mother's milk.

However, in *Sotah* 12b, the Gemara brings a totally different understanding of this verse, based on an account quoted by Rashi in our *parasha* (*Shemos* 2:7). When Basya pulled Moshe out of the Nile, he refused to nurse from any of the Egyptian women. Basya brought a Jewish woman (not knowing it was Yocheved, Moshe's own mother). The Gemara explains that Moshe's refusal was because a mouth destined to talk to God could not possibly enjoy the milk of a non-Jewish woman. Based on this we can read the earlier quoted *posuk* in a new light. Who shall teach the word of God? Only someone who removed himself from milk of a non-Jewish woman.

Interestingly, this has real *Halachic* ramifications. Rema (*Shulchan Aruch*, YD 81:7) writes that although a child may nurse from a non-Jew, and the milk is technically kosher, it should be avoided because it can negatively affect the soul of a Jew. The Vilna Gaon comments that the source for this law is this story of Moshe's refusal to nurse from the Egyptian women. Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky (*Emes Lyaakov*, p. 249) states that seemingly this story should have no implications on the *halacha*. Moshe's refusal was based on the fact that he would ultimately talk with G-d, but all other children, who are not destined to talk with G-d, should not be subject to this. Rav Kamenetsky writes that this is a tremendous lesson in how to raise our children. We have to treat every child as someone who has the chance of speaking with G-d, trying to give them an upbringing infused with ideals of striving for the greatest possible levels. 🕒

## A PARASHA THOUGHT

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to break her *teva*, her nature. Hashem sees this and, *middah k'negged middah* (measure for measure), He breaks *teva* as well, making a *nes* for her. This may have been unnecessary, yet it was an indication for Basyah that He has seen her choices and shows His support for them and her

in the most spectacular of ways. And that moment, her single action of greatness, was the catalyst for the redemption of her newly joined nation and the unlocking of its future potential with the greatest leader it has ever known! 🕒

## TRACING OUR MINHAGIM

RABBI MORDECHAI BERINSTEIN

Many women have a custom of using their hands to block the light of the Shabbos candles from when they light until after reciting the *bracha* (blessing). The source for this is the Maharil, cited by Rema (*OC*, 263:5), who explains that, as a general rule, *brachos* are made **before** partaking in whatever the blessing is on. However, our custom is to make the blessing on the candles **after** lighting them. Therefore, we cover the candles after lighting, to delay deriving benefit from them until after the *bracha*.

(The reason why we make the *bracha* on the candles after lighting is because Shabbos is accepted at the time of the blessing. Since lighting a candle is forbidden on Shabbos, we are forced to light before the *bracha*. This explanation is offered by Rabbi Yehoshua Falk Katz (d. 1614) author of the *D'risha* and *Rosh Yeshiva* in Lemberg, quoting his mother).

About how exactly the candlelight should be concealed, the Rema says to cover the candle itself. However, the *Aruch Hashulchan* (263:13) mentions covering the eyes. The source for the waving hand motions that many make when they light is unclear. 🕒

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