



Bringing the Farbrengen Home

FILLING THE HOUSE

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

It's one of the classic stories of the Torah: Baby Moses is placed in a wicker basket, and sent floating down the Nile River. Discovered by Pharaoh's daughter, he is rescued and, well, you know the rest of the story.

This week's Torah portion, Shemot (the first of the Book of Exodus), is somewhat of a gloomy portion. After all, it describes in detail the servitude of the Jewish people in Egypt. Yet even in the darkest of times, there is light: In this case, we also read of the birth of Moses.

Every time I read the passage of the birth of Moses, I recall the Talmudic debate concerning the words, "And she [Moses' mother] saw him, that he was good" (Exodus 2:2).

What does the Torah mean that "he was good"? Aren't all babies good?

The Talmud and the Zohar debate the issue. The two opinions offered are: 1. He was born circumcised; 2. The entire house filled with light.

Make up your mind, which one is it? What did Moses' mother see?

The answer, of course, is both. The Talmud is not arguing about what Moses' mother saw; rather, the discussion surrounds which was his prime defining quality.

Being born circumcised represents a person who is on a lofty spiritual level.

Filling the house with light, on the



other hand, represents one's ability to positively affect others.

So the Talmudic debate, then, is regarding which of these positive qualities made Moses the great leader that he was: his lofty spiritual level, or his unique ability to positively influence others.

While both are certainly indispensable (and go hand-in-hand), it is interesting to note that in his commentary on this verse, Rashi quotes only the second Talmudic opinion, that the house filled with light. Perhaps this alludes to a fundamental truth: While it is certainly critical to strive to become a better person, what truly makes one a leader is the ability to share that goodness with others. ☯

Hayom Yom

21 Teves

The Rebbe, R. Yosef Yitzchak, once met a watercarrier carrying full buckets and remarked: When one encounters water there is an appropriate maxim of the Baal Shem Tov that he should say, namely: "When encountering water one should say that the Baal Shem says that it is a sign of blessing."

א גוט שבת!

Just שו"ת Me A Question

Q: I have a limited amount of time each week to learn Torah. Am I obligated to do *Shnayim Mikra*, or may I learn something else?

WHO: The gemora (Berachos 8a) says that one should always complete his Torah portions with the congregation. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein writes that a "Ben Torah" who may feel it is a "waste of time" is obligated. Likewise, one who has limited time is also required to do *Shnayim Mikra*.

WHAT: The best way to do it is by reading each verse twice, followed by Onkelos, because this is the way the way that the Torah was read during the times when a translator ("meturgeman") was used. Ideally, listening to the Torah reading in shul on Shabbos does not count as one time (Mishnah Berurah 185:2).

WHERE: There is an entire section in Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 185) which details the laws of *Shnayim Mikra*.

WHEN: Although one may begin on Sunday, the ideal time is on Erev Shabbos. If one does not complete it before Shabbos begins, one should endeavor to complete it before the Shabbos day meal. If one still hasn't completed it, one has until the following Tuesday (or even until Shemini Atzeres) to make it up.

WHY: Although Aruch HaShulchan writes that we do not know the reason for this law, the Levush says that it is in order that we should be well-versed in the Torah.

SOUL: The spiritual significance is that we read each verse twice in order to give ourselves an extra boost of strength from Torah, before venturing out into the world of "translation," i.e., when we engage with the world and bring the values and message of Torah to the world at large.

Source: Shulchan Aruch HaRav O.C. 185; Sichos Kodesh of Lubavitcher Rebbe, Beshalach 5781.

The Wheel of Fortune

Chassidic Story

by Rabbi Shaul Wertheimer

Some 300 years ago, a man named Avigdor brought a large sum of money to the Baal Shem Tov to be distributed on his behalf to the poor.

Accepting the contribution graciously, the Baal Shem Tov inquired if perhaps there was something Avigdor would like in return. "No thanks!" replied Avigdor arrogantly. "I am very wealthy, I own many gorgeous properties, I have servants, plenty of delicacies and everything else I want. I have more than I need!"

"You are very fortunate," replied the Baal Shem Tov. "Perhaps you would like a blessing?"

"A blessing? I have a large and healthy family of which I am very proud; it is a credit to my success. I need – nor want – nothing."

A very humble man, the Baal Shem Tov felt bad for Avigdor. Such hubris! All things that go up, must come down, and the Baal Shem Tov knew that it was only a matter of time before Avigdor would be brought down very low.

"Well then, perhaps you can help me. May I request one thing of you?" inquired the Baal Shem Tov. "Can you please deliver a letter to the head of the charity committee in the city of Brody?"

"Certainly," responded Avigdor. "I live in Brody, and would be happy to assist you in this matter."

The Baal Shem Tov took out a pen and paper, wrote a letter, sealed it in an envelope and gave it to Avigdor.



Avigdor took the letter, placed it in his jacket pocket, and promptly forgot about it. 16 years passed, and the wheel of fortune turned. All of Avigdor's assets and properties were lost or destroyed. Floods ruined his fields of crops; fires destroyed his forests. Calamity after calamity. He was left impoverished.

Creditors took his house and everything he owned. He was forced to sell even his clothing to feed his children. One day, he took an old jacket, ready to sell it for cash. In one of the pockets, he found a letter. It was the letter that he had received from the Baal Shem Tov 16 years prior. He had forgotten to deliver it. In a flash, he recalled his visit and his haughtiness when he thought he had everything. With tears in his eyes, he rushed to finally fulfill his mission and deliver the letter. The envelope was addressed to a Mr. Tzaddok, chairman of the charity committee of Brody.

He ran into the street and encountered one of his friends. Grabbing his arm, he said, "Where can I find Mr. Tzaddok?"

"Mr. Tzaddok? You mean Mr. Tzaddok, the chairman of the charity committee?"

"Yes, I must see him immediately!" replied Avigdor.

"He is in the synagogue," said Avigdor's friend. "I was there only a few minutes ago. Mr. Tzaddok is indeed a lucky man. Just this morning he was elected chairman of the charity committee."


"Mr. Tzaddok was born and raised here in Brody. A tailor by profession. He sat in the back of the synagogue, and no one ever took notice of him. He never earned much; even enough money to purchase one loaf of bread for his large family was difficult for him to earn.

"Recently, however, the tide changed. Mr. Tzaddok was introduced to a local nobleman, and he made uniforms for all his servants. The nobleman was very satisfied with Mr. Tzaddok's craftsmanship, and his business started to pick up. He even received an order for 5000 uniforms for the army. He became a rich man and did not forget his former poverty, and gave generously to many, taking an active role in communal affairs. Just this morning, he was elected chairman of the charity committee."

Hearing this story, Avigdor hurried to the synagogue, and found Mr. Tzaddok busy perusing the many requests for financial assistance. He handed Mr. Tzaddok the letter. Together they read the words of the Baal Shem Tov, penned 16 years earlier:

"Dear Mr. Tzaddok: The man who brought this letter is named Avigdor, and was once very wealthy, but is now very poor. He has paid for his haughtiness. Since just this morning you were elected chairman of the charity committee, I request that you do all you can to assist him, as he has a large family to support. He will once again become successful, and this time he is more humbly suited to success. In case you may doubt my words, I give you the following sign: Your wife is expecting a baby, and today will give birth to a boy."

They had hardly concluded reading the letter, when someone burst into the synagogue and exclaimed, "Mazel tov, Mr. Tzaddok! Your wife just had a baby boy!"

The wheel of fortune had turned full circle, and the Baal Shem Tov's undelivered letter had finally reached its proper destination. Avigdor once again became very affluent, remained humble, and became admired by all. 

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