

Mashiach – Nature and Nurture – Shmot

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וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֶּלֶד וַתְּבַאֲהוּ לְבֵית פַּרְעֹה וַיְהִי לָהּ לְבֵן וַתִּקְרָא שְׁמוֹ מֹשֶׁה וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי מִן
הַמִּצְרִים מְשִׁיתָהוּ. (שמות א, י)

The first Mashiach was Moshe Rabbeinu. HKB"H chose Moshe to be the מְשִׁיתָהוּ who would redeem Bnei Yisrael from slavery in Egypt, lead them through Yam Suf, bring them to Har Sinai, receive the Torah and transform them into a nation – Am Yisrael.

The Torah devotes four of its five books entirely to Moshe Rabbeinu (Shmot – Devarim), prominently featuring Moshe in the psukkim. We therefore know a lot about Moshe Rabbeinu, both from the psukkim and also from Chazal. There are, however, two periods in Moshe's life, about which we know *very little* – from the time he was born until he left Pharaoh's palace (aged 20 or 40, it is a machloket כִּז, א, שמות רבה) – his childhood. The second is the period from when he fled Egypt to Midyan/Kush until he returned to Egypt at age 80. From age 80 onwards the Torah and Chazal go into great detail about his life, but until age 80, details are scarce and the Torah only provides "highlights" about certain incidents, like killing the Egyptian, Datan and Aviram fighting with each other, Moshe fleeing Egypt, rescuing Yitro's daughters, marrying Tizpporah, tending Yitro's flocks.

In this shiur I would like to examine the childhood period of Moshe's life, from his birth until he left Pharaoh's palace. We all wonder who "our" Mashiach will be, the final Mashiach, HKB"H's messenger to herald our Geulah. What kind of person will he be? Where is he born? How does he grow up? Who are his parents? What education does he get? etc. I believe that examining Moshe's childhood will give us some insight into answering these questions.

So let us begin at the beginning and learn many unknown facts about Moshe Rabbeinu.

The psukkim from and Midrashim on our parsha, describe the circumstances surrounding Moshe's birth.

Amram, the gadol hador, married his aunt Yocheved, who was a daughter of Levi (son of Yaakov) and was born בֵּין הַחֻמוֹת just before Yaakov and his sons entered Egypt (Bava Batra 123b). After Amram and Yocheved already gave birth to Miriam and Aharon (שמות ב, א, Ramban), the Midrash (יח, שמות רבה א, יח) tells us that Pharaoh decreed that all male born children would be cast into and drowned in the Nile, because he had a dream that a male child of Bnei Yisrael

would eventually usurp him. His astrologists told him that they foresaw that the redeemer of Bnei Yisrael על יְדֵי מַיִם יִלְקָה - would "meet his end" through water, that Moshe would perish because of מֵי מְרִיכָה. They didn't see the details - all they saw was that it would be connected somehow with water.

Following this decree, Amram decided to divorce Yocheved (Sotah 12a) since he saw no point in giving birth to children so that the Egyptians would drown them in the Nile. The rest of Bnei Yisrael followed suit and divorced their wives. Miriam "chastised" her father Amram saying "Your decree is worse than Pharaoh's. Pharaoh only decreed on the male children and you decreed also on the females. Pharaoh decreed only to kill the children in עוֹלָם הָזֶה and you decreed both in עוֹלָם הָזֶה and עוֹלָם הַבָּא (in order to merit עוֹלָם הַבָּא a neshama has to first be born in עוֹלָם הָזֶה, even if for a fleeting instant). Amram recanted and remarried Yocheved and baby Moshe was born.

Was Moshe born with the name Moshe? The Gemara (Sotah 12a) describes Moshe's birth. R' Meir says that when he was born, Amram and Yocheved named him טוֹב. R' Yehuda says they named him טוֹבִיָּה. R' Nechemya says that Yocheved saw with Ruach HaKodesh (Rashi ibid.) that he would be fit for נְבוּאָה. Another (anonymous) Tannah (אַחֲרִים אוֹמְרִים - some say R' Meir) says that he was born מְהוּל. And the Chachamim say that when he was "born Moshe" (the Chachamim seem to imply that he was *born already with the name Moshe*), the entire house filled with light.

The psukkim (ב-י, שמות) tell us that Yocheved hid baby Tov/Tuvya/Moshe for three months, until she could no longer conceal his existence. She then placed him in a תֵּבָה גִּמְאָה, some kind of reed basket (the word "teiva" reminds us of the word used for Noach's ark, a flat-bottomed vessel – the same term used to describe one of the opinions of the shape of the Lechem HaPanim – תֵּבָה פְּרוּצָה). The basket was lined on the outside with some kind of tar/bitumen (to make it waterproof) and on the inside with plaster (to prevent Moshe smelling the bad odor of the tar). Noach's ark was lined both on the outside *and* the inside with tar – a double layer – to keep out the tumultuous waters of the flood. Yocheved placed her son in the basket amongst the reeds by the banks of the Nile. Moshe's sister Miriam kept a lookout to see what would become of him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came to bathe in the river together with her maidservants and she saw the basket in the reeds. The Gemara (Sota 12b) says she either sent her maidservant (R' Nechemya) or stretched her arm (R' Yehuda) which became elongated to a length of 60 amah (ב, ה, שמות). She opened the basket and found a baby inside. She had pity on him and said מִיָּלֵדִי הֶעֱבְרִים זֶה.

Miriam, who was all the while waiting and watching, addressed Pharaoh's daughter, "Let me call a wet nurse from the עֶבְרִית to nurse the baby". Pharaoh's daughter agreed and Miriam went to call Yocheved. Pharaoh's daughter commissioned Yocheved to take the baby to her own home and nurse him until he was weaned (until age two years/three months?). Yocheved then took Moshe back to Pharaoh's daughter and she adopted him as her son and named him Moshe, because she said (י, ב, י) (שמות ב, י).

From this passuk to the next passuk (יא) there is a 20/40 year gap. The following passuk continues when Moshe was already grown up, when he left the palace.

What happened in those 20/40 years (Moshe's childhood)?

Let us begin with Pharaoh's daughter. Some opinions say her name was Batya (ויקרא רבה א, ג), some say Bitya (דברי הימים א, ד, יח). Sefer HaYuvlim (מז, ד-י) says her name was Tarmut. Josephus (קדמוניות היהודים ב' ט, ה) calls her Tarmutis.

The Gemara (Megila 13a) says that Pharaoh's daughter (we will call her Bitya, like in Divrei HaYamim) converted - שִׁירְדָה לְרַחוּץ מִגִּילּוּלֵי בֵּית אֲבִיהָ. The Ba'al HaTurim on the passuk (שמות ב, ה) says that the sofei teivot of פָּרְעָה בַּת פְּרָעָה make the word דָּתָה - דָּתָה שֶׁהִלְכָה - לְהַתְנַיֵּיר.

Many of the Mefarshim on that passuk (Sforno, Malbim, Or HaChayim, etc.) focus on the strange formulation of this passuk – "on the river", "next to the river". They ask "What is Pharaoh's daughter doing bathing in the river in the first place?" This is not befitting the daughter of a king to bathe publicly in the river. Usually, the palace had an outer chamber, a bath house close to the river, which was enclosed and private. This is where the members of the royal family would bathe.

The reason is because this was not bathing, it was immersion in a mikva as part of the conversion process.

From this we see that Pharaoh's daughter Bitya was a Tzaddikah who rejected the depraved ways of her father and the Egyptian culture. None of the other Egyptians had mercy on the male children of Bnei Yisrael being thrown into the Nile, but Bitya did, and we now understand why. She immediately recognized that the baby was from Bnei Yisrael, she says it explicitly in the passuk מִיִּלְדֵּי (שם, ו) הָעִבְרִים זֶה, and she did not fear defying her father's decree by adopting him.

When Bitya named him Moshe, it was not just a play on words מן המים, she received this name by Ruach HaKodesh. The Rashba (שו"ת) (הרשב"א, תשובה ו') says that at the instant parents decide what to name their child, HKB"H gives them Ruach HaKodesh and directs them to a preordained name. This could explain the Chachamim's opinion in the Gemara above, that Moshe was already named Moshe by Amram and Yocheved when he was born and that Bitya received the same Ruach HaKodesh. It is unlikely that HKB"H would allow the iconic leader of Am Yisrael to retain an Egyptian name - just like Yosef died with the name Yosef in the Torah and not the Egyptian name Pharaoh gave to him צִפְנִית פַּעֲנִיחַ. Similarly, if the name Moshe would not have been ordained by HKB"H, it would not have persisted.

How long was Moshe nursed by Yocheved? The Midrash (אוצר מדרשים) (דברי הימים למשה רבינו, ד', דפוס לבוב תרכ"ה) says that Bitya tried to get Egyptian wet nurses to feed Moshe, but he refused to nurse from them. This is when Miriam suggested that Bitya send for Yocheved.

According to Philo, a Hellenistic Jewish philosopher from the Roman empire period (20BCE), who is often quoted by the Mefarshim, (like the Malbim – (שמות ב', י), Moshe's weaning period was much shorter than normal. Normally a child is weaned by age two (re: Yitzchak Avinu – when Avraham made a party, Gitin 5b). Moshe was weaned and grew in a much shorter time – three *months* (פילון האלכסנדרוני, על חיי משה, מהדורת ס' דניאל נטף, כרך א', ירושלים תשמ"ו, (עמ' 217-216). According to Sefer Yuvalim (above), it was only for three *weeks*!

During this period of nursing, Amram was also teaching Moshe Torah. How do you teach a three-week-old baby Torah? The same way that R' Yehoshua ben Chananya's mother did (Avot 2, 8), she took him straight from the maternity ward to the Beit Midrash so that he could soak up the words of the Torah from birth.

In a previous shiur ([Toldot 2025](#)) we discussed how vital it is that a Jewish child (and adult) never consume non-Kosher food - even breast milk from a non-Jewish mother - as this has an irreversible, detrimental effect on the neshama of the child that manifests later in life.

The Midrash (אוצר מדרשים, שם ה) tells us that when Moshe was three-years-old, Pharaoh and his family were sitting to have dinner - Pharaoh in the middle, his wife to his right and Bitya (with Moshe on her lap) to his left. Baby Moshe playfully took Pharaoh's crown off his head and placed it on his own head. This alarmed Pharaoh and his advisors. One of the advisors (Bilam) said to Pharaoh "Remember the dream you had of a male child usurping you? Do you not know that this child is a child of Bnei Yisrael and it is he who will eventually destroy Egypt. You should immediately sentence him to death and chop off his head!" Pharaoh thought this was a good idea and planned to do so. HKB"H then sent angel Gavriel, who appeared as one of the advisors and said to Pharaoh "It

is not fitting to needlessly spill the blood of a child who has no נִעַת. Instead, let us put him to the test. Place before him a bowl with precious stones and a second bowl with burning coals – and see which bowl he stretches out his hand for. If he reaches for the gems, you will know that he does have נִעַת and you should put him to death. If he reaches for the hot coals, however, it means he has no נִעַת and he should be allowed to live". This reasoning pleased Pharaoh and the other advisors and they conducted the test. Moshe began reaching for the bowl with the gems, but Gavriel diverted his hand to the bowl with the coals. Moshe touched the hot coals and burned his hand. He immediately withdrew his hand, with a burning coal in it, and placed it in his mouth, thus burning his tongue. This is how he acquired a speech impediment.

A slightly different version of this Midrash (שמות רבה א, כו) says that it was a bowl of gold coins and the advisor who suggested this test with the bowls was Yitro. This same Midrash says that Bitya was reluctant to have Moshe appear in public, but since he was such a beautiful child, everyone wanted to see him as much as possible, so she brought him to the dinner. Everyone was so enthralled with baby Moshe, that even Pharaoh himself was hugging and kissing him. This is when Moshe started playing with the crown.

The Siftei Kohen (ש"ך על התורה) asks why Moshe placed a burning coal in his mouth? The instinctive thing to do is to *let go* of the burning coal. The Siftei Kohen says that although the Egyptian wet nurses did not manage to get Moshe to nurse, in the process, a few drops of their milk fell into Moshe's mouth. Moshe said "The mouth that will utter the words of HKB"H and convey the Torah on Har Sinai, cannot be tainted with non-Kosher milk. Moshe Rabbeinu therefore kashered his mouth by doing לבון with the burning coal.

How did Moshe occupy his time in Pharaoh's palace until age 20/40?

Philo (above) says that since Moshe appeared to grow and progress at an above-average rate, they decided that he required tutors. Each tutor they brought to teach Moshe was soon eclipsed by their student. From the wise men of Egypt they brought tutors to teach him math and engineering (the Egyptians were expert engineers – they built the pyramids). They brought tutors to teach him the art of music - tempo, harmony, etc. Philosophers taught him philosophy. Greek tutors taught him general studies of the natural sciences. Assyrian teachers taught him astronomy and astrology ... Moshe was raised as a *prince of Egypt*, destined to eventually succeed Pharaoh.

The Ibn Ezra (שמות ב, ג) says that HKB"H orchestrated Moshe's education, because the future leader of Am Yisrael needed to acquire the skillset necessary for a leader, and not grow up as the son of a slave. The fact that Moshe did not grow up with his brethren ensured that they would not treat him as "one of their own", but rather with the fear and respect befitting a leader.

Despite the "limudei chol"-heavy curriculum, Moshe was never allowed to forget his origins and his heritage. His mother Bitya, who was a גִּרְתָּ צֶדֶק, made sure of this. It is unlikely though that Moshe studied Torah while in the palace of Pharaoh. The proof of this is from a Midrash (תנחומא, כי תשא, טז) which tells us that in the forty days and nights that Moshe was up on Har Sinai being taught Torah from HKB"H Himself, each day he would learn and at the end of the day he would forget what he learned. At the end of the forty days and nights Moshe said "I have learned nothing!" HKB"H then gave the entire Torah to Moshe as a gift. An important lesson for when we study Torah – if we learn with sincere mesirut nefesh, we will eventually be able to retain our learning – because HKB"H will gift that to us. If Moshe had already learned Torah as a child he would have reached Har Sinai already knowing (at least some) Torah.

Moshe's childhood period in the house of Pharaoh was an incubator for leadership. Its purpose was to acquire the skillset to be able to *physically* lead a nation, not to acquire midot.

The midot part was there already from birth. Moshe was born circumcised. The house filled with light the moment he was born. He received unblemished, Kosher milk from a Tzaddikah, his mother Yocheved. He was taught Torah as an infant by the gadol hador, his father Amram - even if for only three months. He was raised by another Tzaddikah, a גִּרְתָּ צֶדֶק, Bitya, daughter of Pharaoh.

Moshe was born connected to water. Pharaoh's astrologers saw this, but they didn't understand what they were seeing. Moshe was saved by water, by the Nile River that instead of causing his demise, delivered him to Bitya's hands. Moshe owed a debt of gratitude to the water that had saved him and therefore could not initiate the plague of blood - Aharon had to initiate it. Moshe, by raising his arms, split the Red Sea and allowed Bnei Yisrael to cross. Moshe gave Am Yisrael the first water in the desert by striking the rock, thus activating the Well of Miriam for the first time. Moshe's downfall was also brought about by water, Mei Meriva.

In last week's shiur ([Vayechi 2025](#)) we learned that the Torah is likened to water and that water symbolizes humility. This was Moshe in a nutshell וְהָאִישׁ מִשָּׁה עָנָו מְאֹד מְכַל הָאָדָם אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה (במדבר יב, ג).

It was not enough though, that Moshe was born with these midot (nature). Often people are born with natural gifts from HKB"H but they do not follow up on their own, nurturing and developing them further.

The reason that the real story of Moshe in the psukim in the Torah only begins when Moshe left the palace at age 20/40 and *skips over his entire childhood*, is because at this age Moshe began to *nurture* his genetic midot. He could easily have continued living the life of a prince (and even a future Pharaoh) in Egypt, instead he ditched it all and became a "political activist" for his

downtrodden, enslaved brethren that resulted in his having to flee the country for 60/40 years (depending on whether he left the palace at 20/40). Moshe chose to cleave to his genetic midot and not ignore them.

So, why did Moshe need to spend his childhood in Pharaoh's palace at all? If HKB"H wanted him to acquire the skillset to lead a nation, why not give it to him at the burning bush? – as a gift! Just like Moshe received the Torah as a gift in the end on Har Sinai, HKB"H could have made him a mathematician, engineer, musician, philosopher, astronomer, astrologist etc. as a gift. How did thirteen-year-old Betzalel acquire the skillset to build the Mishkan? HKB"H gave it to him as a gift – metalwork, weaving, sculpture, gemology, etc.

The answer is a principle brought by the Ba'al HaTania (ליקוטי תניא, לא פשיטת צורה ולבישת צורה) called (אמרים א, לא

The purpose of Bnei Yisrael's slavery in Egypt was ultimately to atone for the sin of Adam and Chava and to reset the world to its state as it was during Creation. This is actually what happened at Har Sinai.

To truly fix something that is broken, you need to strip away all the decayed, damaged parts, retrieving only the intact core part and building upon it. You cannot put plasters upon plasters over the damaged organism and expect it to be resuscitated. Medically (and conceptually) that is not the way to cure the illness.

In order for a seed to grow, you need to plant it in the ground, surrounded by the most disgusting materials known to man, manure, feces, etc. This decaying filth causes the outer layers of the seed to decay and peel off, until the only thing left is the core, from which it sprouts into new life.

To heal the "illness" that resulted from the sin of Adam and Chava, Bnei Yisrael had to be "planted" in the filthiest, most depraved country on earth – Egypt, עֵרֶוֶת הָאָרֶץ. Chazal tell us that someone who entered Egypt could never leave. This is hinted to in the word מִצְרַיִם which begins with an *open* letter "mem", and ends with a *closed* letter "mem-sofit". To enter Egypt is easy, but once you are in, you can never get out. It is not that Pharaoh had soldiers to physically prevent you from leaving, the Egyptian culture sucked you in and irretrievably buried you. You became so damaged in the process that you could not escape, you lost the will to escape.

It was in Egypt that HKB"H "planted" Bnei Yisrael on a macro scale and it was in Pharaoh's house – the most depraved place *within* the most depraved country – where HKB"H "planted" Moshe, on a micro scale.

It was in this decay and filth that all the קְלָפוֹת, the outer layers of sin that persisted in Bnei Yisrael from Adam and Chava's sin, themselves decayed and

peeled off, leaving behind only the inner core neshama which was pure and full of light - from inception. It was this pure core that sprouted anew and grew into new life - Am Yisrael led by a Moshe Rabbeinu. It has to happen this way, far from the vigilant eye of the Satan who, if he noticed, would torpedo it and prevent it from happening. The *last* place the Satan would expect to find a pure neshama is buried in the filth. This is the process of galut and Mashiach.

There were three תינוקות שנשבו, three "babes taken captive" in Egypt. The first was Osnat, the illegitimate daughter of Dina and Shchem ben Chamor, who Yaakov sent away to Egypt with a special pendant around her neck with HKB"H's name engraved on it. The second was Yosef who was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt, retaining only the memory of his loving father Yaakov's face. It was this indelible memory that ultimately saved Yosef from the depravity of Egypt and Potiphar's wife - the image of his father, the image of his infancy that was indelibly carved in his neshama. It was here that he discovered Osnat, daughter of Dina who also retained the spark of her infancy engraved on the pendant and ended up specifically in Potiphar's house as their adopted daughter. The third was Moshe Rabbeinu who was set afloat on the Nile as a baby and taken into the most depraved square meterage on earth - Pharaoh's palace. Moshe too retained the spark from his infancy, from his parents Amram and Yocheved and these extricated him from Pharaoh's house and led him down a path to becoming the Mashiach.

I do not know when HKB"H is going to send the Mashiach, who he will be, who his parents are, where and how he grew up. The chances are, based on the above, that he will *not* emerge from a "likely" place, like Yeshivat Ponevezh, which the Satan has under constant "surveillance". It is more likely that he will emerge from somewhere that nobody could possibly imagine, under the radar of the Satan. It is more likely that he will also be a תינוק שנשבה, if we follow the pattern above.

But these are HKB"H's calculations, not ours. We should *not* be occupying our time and thoughts with these things. Instead, we should be furiously occupying our time and thoughts with the possibility that *each of us* could be the Mashiach (or the wife of the Mashiach). If each of us takes an honest look at ourselves and assesses how close (or far) we are to becoming a Mashiach (or wife of a Mashiach) and then works furiously to *narrow that gap*, chances are the Mashiach, who is in fact one of us, will emerge sooner than expected.

If we all take our nature, the gifts that HKB"H gave us, nurture and develop them for the purpose He intended, then Mashiach is just around the corner and the twelfth principle of the Rambam's י"ג עקרין is not a pipe dream, it is a statistical certainty.

Shabbat Shalom

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