

## Parshat Shemot: Chief Criterion

Summary by Channie Koplowitz Stein  
Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Smiles

Hashem's first interaction with Moshe was at the burning bush in the wilderness where he had come with his sheep. The Siach Mordechai asks, why did Hashem choose to appear to Moshe there? Why do we find that so many of our leaders were originally shepherds? Why is going to graze the sheep far into the wilderness to avoid theft, as Rashi explains, so important for proper leadership, asks the Bekorei Shemo?

The Tiv Hatorah and the Ruach Eliyahu note that being a shepherd provides time and solitude for internal contemplation, allowing one to know himself and work on his *middot*. In public, one may be afraid of others mocking him for trying to improve. So too, it is important for each of us to carve out some quiet, alone time as we go about our daily lives, adds Rabbi Svei.

Moshe encountered the burning bush while searching for a stray sheep. He found it near some water, and displaying rare sensitivity, Moshe picked up the tired sheep and carried it back to the flock. When one has compassion on others, one opens the gates of heaven and acts as a conduit for Hashem's compassion to flow down to *Bnei Yisroel*, writes the Imrei Shefer. What made Moshe

and later King David, so fitting to be a leader, says Rabbi Y Levovits was their sensitivity. Rabbi Pliskin urges us to observe the discomfort of others even when they do not express any need, either out of a sense of pride or perhaps out of not even understanding what they need.

The Sifsei Chaim reminds us that one can truly gauge the character of another through his private actions. Moshe's sensitivity to an insignificant lamb in no man's land bore witness to his innate compassion. Whether in choosing a teacher or finding a *shidduch*, it is only in the seeming insignificant details, that we see the true measure of a person's *middot*. So too when tragedy strikes, we all become compassionate and try to help, observes Siach Mordechai. But how many of us reach out to those struggling alone far from the public eye? A Jewish leader, writes the Ohr Chodosh, is not afraid to admit a mistake or to ask forgiveness. It was this quality that Yaakov saw in Yehudah who publicly admitted his guilt in the story of Tamar. It was Yehudah who took responsibility for the sale of Yosef and then protected Binyamin. This was the quality Hashem saw in Moshe, a compassion for others, writes the Be'er Yosef.

Finally, a great Jewish leader must be careful not to usurp the property of others. That is why it was important that Moshe take the sheep far from the property of others. The Tosher Rebbe z"l explains that one who is careful about not stealing, will recognize that Hashem is the Master of the world, and will not try and lord over others with arrogance.

Rabbi Besdin z"l explains that all sinning derives from a form of thievery. Everything we have is a gift God allows us to use in His service. When we transgress, we are misusing that which He has lent us, thereby "stealing" from Him and denying His sovereignty. Are we wasteful of the paper towels provided at different facilities? Are we careful not to abuse office supplies at work? Equally important, are we using the opportunities presented to us to help and inspire others as parents or teachers, asks the Tosher Rebbe z"l. If we fail to prepare our lessons adequately and take our responsibilities seriously, we are stealing this teachable moment from our children.

We are all leaders in some way with the ability to help and influence others. We must learn from our great role models of leadership to interact with others with humility, absolute honesty, and sensitivity.

## Introduction to Eishes Chayil Part III

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Mrs. Shira Hochheimer

While the tone of most of Mishlei is very directive, *Eishes Chayil* is positive and tells us a story of what we should become versus what she should not become. The first three verses of *Eishes Chayil* talk about partnership, trust, and kindness. The next few verses tell us how to live our life, how to communicate, how to access spirituality, how to approach our professional work, our domestic responsibilities, and our parenting. The last four verses give us an ideal to strive for. "Her children and husband will get up and praise her." The goal of *Eishes Chayil* is not a popularity contest. If our children and husbands can praise us, although they are the one's who see us when the stakes are down, when we're frustrated, angry, and tired, then we have accomplished

a lot. *Eishes Chayil* tells us, "*Sheker hachen v'hevel l'yofi*." We're not looking to get entangled in the superficialities of life. We're not looking to be charming or beautiful. Our goal is to do Hashem's will. We want to focus on becoming the ideal person, on earning the respect of the people we love and cherish. We want to live a life where we know we will receive ultimate reward at the end of time.

The Midrash gives us a deeper meaning of the text. It references famous woman in Tanach such as the *imahot*, Miriam, Batya, Elisheva, as paragons of what an *Eishes Chayil* is meant to be. *Devora Haneviah* is not included. Why? Perhaps this explanation based on a concept explained by Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, might be the answer. *Devora* was a judge and a

leader. The Mishna in Avot says one should be the tail of a strong leader rather than the head of a weak band of followers. It also says, "In a place where there is no man try to be a man." The corollary to that is, if there are already people taking on responsibility, there's no reason for us to take it upon ourselves. Leadership is not about manipulating people. It's fulfilling our responsibility. *Devora* was a public leader out of necessity. It shouldn't be a woman's ideal goal. We need to show leadership qualities within our inner world, our home, and that is what the women in the Midrash did. Their life stories are powerful. They made choices in their own lives that we can learn from. Nobody lives a life where they are guaranteed an outcome they would want.

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But we can make choices on how we will live that life.

Generally, there is one episode highlighted in the *Midrash* for each woman. It depicts how she rose to her challenge as a result of living her life according to the *Eishes Chayil*. How we react to crisis is not based on any specific situation but on all the times we faced challenges successfully. This is what we can

learn from these women in *Tanach*. Each of them was connected with other people. *Sarah* had a husband and brother. *Rivka* had twin sons. *Batya's* father was Pharaoh. They were not praised for what other people did, but for what they did and that's a very important lesson. Oftentimes when we begin working on a specific flaw, we tend to notice it in other people. If I'm focusing on the need for preparation, I'll notice my students whose mothers don't have their homework signed and

don't have their knapsacks packed up properly. We must remember that the only one who will be judged is ourselves. The Gemara in *Kedushin* says, "*Kol haposol b'mumo posel*," one who faults is really faulting himself." If we see a problem, it means we need to self-reflect and solve the problem within ourselves because that is the only person we can ultimately change.

## Builder of Her Home: The Valid Woman

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

The Taana Dvei Eliyahu tells us, "*Eizehu isha kesheira she'ose retzon baaleh*, who is a valid woman one who does her husband's will."

Yael, the wife of Chevar Hakeni, is the quintessential example. The Keni were the descendants of Yitro who converted to Judaism and were not eligible to get a portion in Israel. They were given some land, almost arbitrarily, near Yericho until the time it would be needed. The Midianites, enemies of the Jewish people, assumed mistakenly that the Keni harboured resentment about this. Chever Hakeni took advantage of this misconception and became a counterspy for the Jews. Sisra, the leader of the Midianites, ran to Yael's tent thinking he had reached safety. Yael killed him and the result was the Midianite's downfall. How did she know the right thing to do? Her husband putting his life on the line for the Jews made her say I will do the same. She was totally aligned with his will and thereby merited to save the Jewish people.

This too is the merit of women in the broad sense. We are not talking about submission in a random sense, but something deeper. It's about how to make wholeness in a human being and in one's home, which can only happen where there's absolute partnership.

This unity is created by the woman, by her aligning herself with her husband and doing his will. Yael didn't think, is it worth it for me to involve myself with Sisra; rather is it worth it for us, for where we are going. The man has the vision. The woman makes it happen. In the case of Chever Hakeni, he wanted the benefit of the Jewish people. Yael brought it to completion.

Different paths in Judaism will ultimately lead to the same goal. Although, how to do it may be different, the actual achievement is the same. The longest parsha in the Torah is Parshat Naso which lists the sacrifices that each of the *nesiim* brought at the completion of the *mishkan*. Why does the Torah enumerate each one separately if each tribe brought an identical sacrifice? What they did may have seemed the same on the outside, but on the inside it was different. Each tribe had a different vision and potential, but the ultimate goal was the same. The *tzura*, the structure, as opposed to the *hashkafa*, the inner vision, is what's important. Therefore, in a *shidduch*, a young woman should look where her prospective husband is really going, what is goals are, how sincere he is, not just what he idealizes.

"Hashem made the male and female and he

blessed them and he called their name *adam*." Picture a bar cut it in half. Color one side blue and the other side red. This is the complete image of a human being. Both are fifty percent, but one is the lead bar and the other is the follower. There's no completion without either one.

This desire to complete the man's vision is inherent in a woman's nature. A man abandons his parents and cleaves to his wife because only she can turn him into a man, only she can turn him into something he wants to be. She's called *isha* because she was taken from *ish*. This means her deeds and her *middot* should be taken from what he is. She has to use the depth of her insight to know how to take what they both want and make it happen. Their house should be a mirror of both of them, her actualizing and his envisioning. Although their roles seem very separate, there is in fact a great deal of interaction. The Gemara says, when he's determining "what" he should hear her. When she's figuring out "how" he should be in the picture. A righteous woman is one who accepts the potentials that her husband wants to bring forth. She makes things happen and thereby creates wholeness and completion in her home.