

Parshat Shemot: Batya, Devoted Daughter

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

The *parshiyot* of Shovavim, which tell the story of our sojourn in Egypt and our redemption, are a lesson for us on how to extricate ourselves from our own personal narrow straits and how to eventually reach the goal of Matan Torah.

The *parsha* tells us that Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, went down to the Nile River to bathe. There she found a weeping Jewish baby in a basket, stretched out her hand, and saved him. Several questions immediately arise. What possessed Batya to go against her father's wishes to save a Jewish baby? In addition, the Sforno asks, how did a royal princess stoop to bathe in public?

He answers that she went to a private bathhouse overlooking the river, and from there she saw Moshe. However, most commentators say that she went down to the river because she had come to wash herself from the idolatry of her father. She was completing the process of conversion by immersing herself in the Nile. Batya saw her father acting like a demon, recognized his corruption, and rebelled against it. Her conversion took place on the 6th day of Sivan, the very day Klal Yisrael accepted the Torah. This is noted in the Gemara, which states that Moshe was born on the 7th of Adar and Yocheved hid him for three months.

The Brisker Rav points out that the connection between Batya finding Moshe in the basket and her conversion was no

coincidence. Because she had come to elevate herself, Hashem sent her a sign from above in the form of the great light of Moshe to show her that her act of righteousness was accepted.

Moshe had many names, but because Batya did *chesed* with him, her name is the one used in the Torah. The Be'er Moshe notes this as an example of the extraordinary power of *chesed*. Indeed, it was fitting that Batya's first act as a Jew was *chesed*. The moment when Batya reached out her hand to save Moshe was a micro sense of a macro event in Jewish history. It was not only about *chesed*. It was about *mesirat nefesh* as well. Batya sacrificed herself entirely to raise a Jewish child against her father's wishes. This unusual *mesirat nefesh* was later implanted in Moshe when he became the leader of the Jewish people. What was Batya's greatness that made her worthy to see the *Shechina*? She performed the mitzvah of *chesed* without any ulterior motive other than to save a Jewish child. Let us never underestimate the power of doing one *mitzva b'shleimut*. The Yalkut Lekach Tov writes that Batya did not know that Hashem would perform a miracle. Yet she stretched out her hand to try and save the child. Often in life we look at daunting projects or the state of our *avodat Hashem* and it all seems so overwhelming. Yet Batya teaches us that even if something seems beyond our capabilities, we need only extend ourselves

a bit and the heavenly treasures will open up to assist us. Similarly, the Kotzker Rebbe notes that Moshe was in a precarious situation on the Nile, but Hashem made sure that the source of redemption would be there. All of us, in whatever swamps of life we find ourselves mired in, should never despair of Hashem's protection. He can easily send us our deliverance. All we need to do is stretch out our hand, move beyond ourselves, and Hashem will take care of the rest.

Another lesson noted by the Steipler is that as much as we work hard to achieve something it will only succeed if Hashem wills it. This is borne out with the ironic fact that Paroh, who had decreed Moshe's death, was the one who raised him in his very own home. We do not control destiny. We need to do our part, but simultaneously we must recognize that ultimately it is Hashem who orchestrates everything. Batya is not just a description of a personality in Tanach, but of each one of us. We are all daughters of the king. "*V'takam b'od layla*. She awakes at night." Batya knew she was destined to save the redeemer. Therefore, she would go every night to the river to search for Moshe. We too, like Batya, should arise every morning with a mission. Her good deed changed the world, her single act of *chesed* impacted history. We too have the power within us to influence destiny with one small *mitzvah* performed *b'shleimut*.

Rebbetzin's Perspective I Class 12

Excerpted from Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller's Question and Answer series on Naaleh.com

Question:

What is the Torah perspective on mental disorders? Do people who are mentally ill have free choice? Are they accountable for their deeds?

Answer:

Everyone's free will is limited. No one can make all the choices there are to be made. Understandably, if you weren't gifted with extraordinary intellectual capacities or fiery passion or language skill, Hashem will not expect you to become the next Vilna Gaon or the Sfat Emet or Rav Hirsch. Every individual has his own point of choice, based on his natural capacities and environment. Where a person experiences conflict is where he exercises choice. A

person who goes beyond his individual comfort zone to do what is right utilizes his *bechira* in a significant way.

Mental disorders create limitations. A depressed person will not have full *bitachon*. It is not within his area of conflict. What is within his choice level is choosing to get out of bed even though he desperately wants to stay there. Mentally ill people are rewarded in the areas of life in which they have free choice. They can still reach unbelievably high levels because Hashem judges people by how far they have traveled relative to where they started. Anyone with a mental illness who is making the best choices he can, given his limitations, is a *tzaddik*. The Torah relates to mental illnesses that

are physiological just as it does to physical illnesses. The same way we don't expect someone without arms to put on *tefillin*, we do not expect these types of people to do more than their actual point of choice. However, there are some mental illnesses that are self-developed. People get tangled in crooked methods of thinking that lead to disorders. There is far more responsibility in neurosis than in psychosis. A person like that needs to ask himself: What are my real choices? Do I have to think this way? Is this the truth? Seeking therapeutic help may be the key to such a mentally ill person's ultimate redemption. This too is a choice and one that can eventually lead to recovery.

Principles of Faith: A Deeper Glimpse Into Prayer

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rebbetzin Tziporah Heller

In virtually every society, people pray. Invariably there is something within us that desires a connection with our Creator. Intuitively we know that we did not create ourselves nor was the world created on its own. When we examine nature closely, we perceive its intricacy and purposefulness. We realize that we are here for a purpose and that there is an intelligent Higher Being watching over us and waiting for us to develop an intimacy with Him that parallels no other relationship. Prayer is about making this connection happen.

How do we pray and what are our expectations? Our prayers must be verbal, we must use a traditional prayer book, we must pray within the designated time periods, and our prayers must consist of praise, request, and thanks. Let's examine each premise closely.

Why must we talk to Hashem? Surely he knows our thoughts. Speech is the one capacity we have through which the perfect relationship of body and soul is maintained. The body desires things and it speaks very loudly. Although the soul also has desires, it does not speak as forcefully. However, it speaks with far greater depth and continuity. The soul leads and the body follows. In a developed person, thought is the rider and the mouth and tongue are the horse. The book of Prophets tells us, "Take words with you and return to Hashem." Taking words means taking your essential being. There is

an enormous body of Jewish law related to speech. Besides prayer and blessings, there are laws concerning lies, slander, oaths, and gossip. Words can do more harm or, conversely, more good than almost anything else in life. That is why we take it to Hashem.

Our lives are contained within our own consciousness. Our words can only express what we think and we think "in the box." This has to do with our nature, upbringing, and environment. The function of tefillah is to break through this box and give us back prayer in its highest possible human form. People begin speaking a new language when they identify their inner reality and thoughts with the language spoken. In Babylonia the Jews spoke Aramaic because Babylonia resonated with who they wanted to be. In contrast, the Jews of Europe spoke Yiddish for close to a thousand years because they did not identify with the society around them. When the Jews returned to Israel to rebuild the second Temple, they continued speaking Aramaic. It was then that the Men of the Great Assembly decided to "Return the crown to its former glory," to reinstate Hebrew as the language of the Jews. One step was to compile the Siddur. The goal was to give voice to the way Jews addressed themselves to Hashem. There are no random words in the Siddur. Its sequence and spelling are meaningful. Every word encompasses enormous depth, consideration, and thought. The Siddur is not meant to

be expressive but rather transformative, not only in telling us who we are, but in informing us who we can be in our search for Hashem.

Siddur literally means ordered or arranged. There are various versions or Nusachim. The most ancient and intact version is Nusach Ashkenaz which was used by Jews from Western Europe. Arguably, Nusach Sefardi, utilized by Jews living in Arab lands, is close to or equally old. In the 15th century, the great mystic scholar, the Arizal, developed Nusach Sefard corresponding to the 13th gate. This is based on the idea that there were 12 gates for each of the tribes, which lead up to the Temple. The 13th gate was a general entrance for everyone. Today when the tribes have mixed we need to use the 13th gate. Nusach Sefard is generally utilized by Chassidim. Nusach Ari is a later editing of Nusach Sefard.

The Arizal viewed every prayer as unique. He taught that the continual evolution of the world's spiritual nature affects tefillah and therefore no two prayers are alike. Generally, we pray the nusach handed down to us through the generations. If you do not have a tradition, your safest choice would be Nusach Ashkenaz, which is arguably the most ancient. A differing view maintains that one should pray Nusach Ari based on the opinion that each Nusach is progressive and more in touch with our current level.

Eating Before Davening

Based on a Naaleh.com shiur by Rabbi Ari Jacobson

The Gemara teaches us, based on the verse in Vayikra, "Lo tochlu al hadam," that one may not eat or drink before Shacharit. The Kitzur Shulchan Aruch writes that one who does eat is referred to in the verse, "You have cast me behind your back." In Hebrew, the word *gabecha* (back) can be interchangeably read as *geyecha* (arrogance). Tending to one's own physical needs prior to acknowledging the source of one's sustenance is haughtiness in one of its highest forms.

The accepted ruling in the Shulchan Aruch is that one may drink water before praying. Similarly, someone who is very weak and will be unable to have minimal concentration may eat before davening. However, at the very least, one should recite *birkot hashachar* beforehand. The majority of halachic opinions permit drinking coffee or tea if a person needs it to concentrate in prayer. The Mishna Berura prohibits adding milk or sugar as one may only drink what is minimally necessary. However, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach writes that in our times when most people can afford milk and sugar and are generally accustomed to it daily, it is permitted. Going beyond this

and having a cappuccino or a double vanilla shake is prohibited. The Kitzur writes further that someone who is old or weak and cannot wait till the end of davening on Shabbat and Yom Tov, when the prayers are lengthy, should daven *Shacharit* at home, make kiddush and eat something, and then go to shul for *Mussaf*.

How do these *halachot* apply to women? The Mishna writes that women are obligated to pray because they need Hashem's mercy too. The Rambam holds that the Torah obligation of *tefilah* is to pray once a day in any language as long as it includes praise, supplication, and thanks. The specific text and times are d'rabananan. The Rambam disagrees and states that *tefilah* on a daily basis is completely d'rabananan. Only in times of distress does prayer become a Torah obligation.

The Magen Avraham notes that women in ancient times who would pray a *tefilah* in their own language were relying on the Rambam. Some modern day poskim continue to argue that women can fulfill their obligation with a short prayer that includes praise, supplication, and thanks. Others say that they must recite the *Shemonei Esrei* of

Shachrit and *Mincha* daily. The consensus among all poskim is that women are exempt from *Maariv* because this was originally voluntary for men.

Rav Shlomo Zalman rules that the *halachot* of eating before davening apply equally to women. Therefore, a woman must pray before eating unless she is weak or infirm, in which case a man would be exempt too. On *Shabbat*, a woman should daven whatever prayers she is accustomed to praying and then make Kiddush.

Many times, women who are busy with their family may make it to shul late on Shabbat. If a woman arrives when the *tzibbur* is already davening *Mussaf*, she should daven *Shacharit* first. Rav Akiva Eiger writes that women may be exempt from *Mussaf*. This is because even though *Shacharit* and *Mincha* have an element of sacrificial services, they are mainly an expression of compassion. However, *Mussaf* strictly corresponds to sacrifices. Since women did not contribute to the half *shekel* and did not participate in the sacrifices, there is a *machloket* whether they are obligated to pray *Mussaf* at all. Therefore, for women, *Shachrit* takes precedence over *Mussaf*.