

PARSHA

## SHEMOT

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# 578

### THE PROMISE OF DELIVERANCE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF PRAYER

*Rabbi David Pinto Chlita*

It is written, "The Children of Israel groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d. G-d heard their moaning, and G-d remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob" (Shemot 2:23-24).

This period of slavery in Egypt had been decreed by Hashem. He had promised the Patriarchs that the Jewish people would emerge after 400 years of exile with a mighty hand, an outstretched arm, and with great wealth. This is why I'm surprised: Would the Children of Israel not have been delivered without their prayers? After all, the exodus from Egypt was included in the covenant that G-d made with the Patriarchs! Deliverance would automatically follow their enslavement, not being dependent on anything else, such as prayer for example. That being the case, why does the Torah point out that G-d heard the moaning and cries of the Children of Israel, and that only then did He agree to save them? In reality, the very purpose of delivering the Jewish people was to create a bond between them and their Creator, a bond without which freedom would have been completely meaningless. As we know, prayer establishes a connection between a person and his Creator. By imploring Hashem, the Jewish people merited deliverance by cleaving to G-d and belonging to Him. It is prayer that supplied the content and meaning of their deliverance. Without their supplications, they would not have been worthy to receive the Torah. Obviously, because of the covenant sealed between G-d and the Patriarchs, the Children of Israel would have been delivered even without prayer. However prayer enabled them to enjoy complete deliverance, infusing them with a realization that everything comes from G-d. Hence the Torah made certain to mention the moaning of the Jewish people before their deliverance.

that he was about to die, Hezekiah asked Isaiah to end his prophesy and leave. He then went onto his bed and, feeling nothing abnormal in his feet (we know that death first arrives through the feet), he cried out to Hashem and implored Him to give him another chance, to prolong his life in order that he could marry. G-d responded by giving him another chance, by letting him live so he could marry. In fact G-d granted him 15 more years of life in order to rectify his conduct, for He saw that King Hezekiah's prayer emanated from the depths of his heart, from a sincere feeling of remorse. In fact even if a sharp blade is placed on a man's neck, he should not stop imploring G-d for mercy.

This story is difficult to understand, for the Prophet Isaiah knew that as long as a person is still alive, errors can be rectified, meaning that the king still had a chance to ask G-d to annul the decree. As we have said, even in our most agonizing moments, we must not stop imploring G-d for mercy. That being the case, why did Isaiah tell the king that it was already too late and that he couldn't set things right? Given the king's distress, we would have at least expected Isaiah to pray for him, not to discourage him! The answer is that the prayers that others say for us cannot be compared to the prayers that we say for ourselves. Isaiah knew that at that point, once Hezekiah's death had been decreed, only his own prayers – emanating from the depths of his heart, and uttered with all his might and sincere intentions – had the power to change things. King Hezekiah's prayers exerted a much greater influence than those of the Prophet Isaiah, for the prayers that we say for ourselves are the most effective of all.

Hezekiah merited for his experience to teach the Jewish people a new principle, namely that we must not stop beseeching G-d for mercy regardless of the situation that we find ourselves in.

The Prophet Isaiah did not merit this, for he had used disparaging terms to describe the Children of Israel: "I dwell among a people of impure lips" (Isaiah 6:5). Because he accused and disparaged the Children of Israel, he did not merit having his own situation serve as an example for the generations to come. This was reserved for King Hezekiah, who (despite the trial that he endured) did not stop imploring G-d for mercy, beseeching Him with the little strength he had left. I remember that my father was constantly busy with prayer, attempting to awaken Divine mercy for the Jewish people, for the land of Israel, and for the Final Redemption. I'm certain that if someone did not personally deserve to have his prayers answered, the merit of my father's sincere prayers would enable his prayers to be heard and answered. If we go see a tzaddik, we will be delivered on account of his prayers, as well as by the fact that we are annulling ourselves by going to see a tzaddik.



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**HEVRAT PINTO**  
 Under the Direction of  
**Rabbi David Hanania  
 Pinto Shlita**  
**CHEVRAT PINTO**  
 207 West 78th Street  
 New York - NY 10024  
 Tel: 1 212 721 0230  
[www.hevratpinto.org](http://www.hevratpinto.org)  
[hevratpinto@aol.com](mailto:hevratpinto@aol.com)  
 Editor-in-Chief:  
**Hanania Soussan**

### Perpetuating the Memory of Sinai

It is written, “An angel of Hashem appeared to him in a blaze of fire from amid the bush. He saw – and behold, the bush was burning in the fire, but the bush was not consumed!” (Shemot 3:2).

Even thousands of years after G-d revealed Himself to the one who brought the Children of Israel out of Egypt, numerous tourists flock to the awe-inspiring site of the burning bush, to the mountain of G-d, where the Torah was given to the Jewish people not long afterwards, and which brought the hatred of the nations upon Israel. In recent years, the attraction of Mount Sinai has become somewhat of a phenomenon. Thousands of people travel to the Sinai in order to climb Mount Sinai and see something amazing, something embedded in the very stones of the mountain that travelers call Djabel Mussa (“the mountain of Moshe”).

Appearing on every stone from this mountain, regardless of its size, is the image of the bush. According to the Rishonim, it is a Divine image. In fact even if we break or shatter such a stone into the tiniest parts, the entire image appears on each part!

Rabbi Shem Tov HaAfoudi, a commentator on Rambam’s Guide to the Perplexed, wrote the following in regards to these stones:

“We saw the image of the bush on the stones of Mount Sinai. This mountain is therefore called Sinai, after the name of the bush (sneh) [as mentioned in Pirkei D’Rabbi Eliezer, Ch. 41] in which G-d revealed Himself to Moshe. A prominent figure from the Chasdei family brought back one of these stones, and I saw the bush engraved on it with great precision, and this engraving is obviously Divine. I broke the stone in two, and the bush was visible on each part. I then broke the half-part in two and the image appeared on each piece. I continued to break them, until I obtained a piece the size of a pistachio, and I could still see the same image. I was amazed by this and greatly rejoiced.”

People later found proof that confirmed this phenomenon, as mentioned in the book Arvei Nachal by Rabbi Shelmo Eibeshutz on Parsha Shemot:

“We have discovered that the image of the bush appears on all the stones of Mount Sinai. We also noticed something else amazing: If we break one of these stones in two, each piece contains the same engraved image, but smaller than that of the original piece. If we break it into ten thousand pieces, the same image will appear, in miniature, on each piece according to its size. However the image is always whole. It therefore appears that the bush belongs to this mountain of Sinai.”

This discovery has also been scientifically verified at the Geological Institute of Jerusalem, where researchers examined these extraordinary stones from Sinai. They pulverized these stones in order to see if this phenomenon also occurs on the smallest constituent parts, and the result was astounding: These Divine images were present on stone fragments even 2,000 microns large (a micron is one millionth of a meter). Under a microscope at 600x magnification, researchers could clearly see the image of the bush with its numerous stems.

On a deeper level, we can establish a parallel between the image of the bush that is engraved on all parts of these stones and the eternity of the Jewish people. That is, over the generations we have endured expulsions, exiles, pogroms, and of course the Holocaust. Yet despite the fact that we are few in numbers, we have remained wholehearted Jews who are filled with the fear of G-d. Families have been wiped out, entire communities destroyed, but survivors have maintained the same perfection in the performance of mitzvot as before. This is the secret of the eternal people.

#### The Memory of the Revelation at Sinai

For Jews who believe, this incredible discovery perhaps intensifies what our Sages said about the connection between the discussion that took place at the bush where G-d revealed Himself on Mount Sinai and Moshe Rabbeinu. This is what the kabbalist Rabbi Natan Neta Shapira wore in his book Megale Amukot, in which he cites numerous allusions in regards to this subject, the simplest being that the numerical value of the term Sinai is 120, just like the years of Moshe’s life.

In recent years, however, this discovery has enabled us to strengthen the positive Torah mitzvah that consists of remembering the revelation at Sinai, as mentioned in the books of the Rishonim. Let us mention, for example, the comments of the Magen Avraham, who cites the writings of the Arizal in discussing the frame of mind required when reciting, “You have chosen us from among all nations and tongues” (Ahavat Olam blessing for the reading of Shema during Shacharit), namely to recall the revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah. We can thus fulfill this precious mitzvah, which is among the six things that we must remember each day.

Recently, when news of this remarkable phenomenon became more widespread and numerous stones were transferred from Sinai to Israel in order for people to perpetuate the memory of the revelation at Sinai, forces of evil suddenly began to appear. At the border of Taba in the Sinai desert, Egyptians confiscated large quantities of stones taken from Djabel Moussa despite the fact that, legally speaking, it is international territory. Whatever the case, simply being aware of the existence of this Divine image will certainly strengthen our daily recollection of the revelation at Sinai and the giving of the Torah.

## Guard Your Tongue

### The Dust of Lashon Harah

When someone asks us about another person, and we respond by saying: “Don’t ask me such questions. I don’t want to talk about him,” or things to that effect, such that something negative can be deduced about the person in question, this is known as the “dust” (avak) of Lashon Harah.

Likewise, praising a person in front of his friend, in such a way as to arouse his friend’s animosity and incite him to wrong the person himself, also constitutes the “dust” of Lashon Harah.

### Giving Life to a Numerous People

It is written, “The midwives feared G-d, and they did not do as the king of Egypt spoke to them, and they caused the boys to live” (Shemot 1:17).

In the Gemara the Sages explain, “Not only did they not kill them, they also supplied them with water and food” (Sotah 11b). The Midrash Rabba asks, “Because they did not do what he [Pharaoh] had told them to do, must we be [explicitly] told that they saved the children? Why does the verse point this out?”

Here we have a case of praise hidden within praise. Not content with disobeying Pharaoh’s orders, the midwives also demonstrated their great kindness to these infants and their mothers. Some of them were poor, and the midwives went to gather water and food from the homes of the wealthy in order to give them to these poor mothers, who could then sustain their children. Hence the verse says, “they caused the boys to live.”

In the previous generation, Hashem bestowed an angel to the Torah world, an angel who worked to help Holocaust survivors, as well as making enormous efforts to stir up generations of G-d fearing bnei Torah. The name of this angel was Rabbi Shlomo Kahaneman Zatzal, better known as the Rav of Ponevezh. Even before building the Ponevezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, he established the great Batei Avot institution, which was destined to welcome thousands of orphans from the Holocaust who had been brought to Israel. The Rav put his entire heart and soul into this institution.

This was an enormous sacrifice for him, for here we had a famous Rosh Yeshiva who suddenly decides, in his advanced years, to forgo his respected status in order to ensure the education of orphaned boys. He takes this entire responsibility, and its tremendous weight, upon himself alone, bringing into his arms each boy and embracing them like a mother embracing her only son. In fact he fully realized that this is what Hashem wanted from him at the time. The gaon Rabbi Shmuel Rozovsky Zatzal said that whoever saw the Rav of Ponevezh’s incredible bond with the children of Batei Avot would immediately see that he was not only a father of the institution in a general sense, but the father of each child in particular. Someone once asked him, “What are you planning on doing with these orphaned survivors, given the cruel circumstances in which they grew up? They have very little chance of making Torah their main occupation.”

Rav Kahaneman replied, “Have you ever seen a father who tries to determine in advance if it’s ‘worth it’ for him to help his children? Isn’t it the role of a loving and devoted father, who knows the individual character of each of his children, to guide them according to their own particular abilities, and to put an effort into educating them according to what he believes is the best for a given child, not for himself?”

With his characteristic humility, he added: “And are they not all my children?”

As for the question raised by his son, Rabbi Avraham Kahaneman Shlita, on why he devoted all his incredible energies on orphans – since he was constantly saying that the goal of his life was to build a yeshiva – he briefly responded: “In the Gemara the Sages teach, ‘The Torah begins with chesed’ [Sotah 14a]. Hence this is the right path to follow when we want to build Torah.”

### A Chain of Mitzvot

In the room where Rabbi Chaim of Sanz Zatzal used to study, a poor person came to him and showed him his torn shoes. The rainy season was approaching, and he didn’t have enough money to buy new ones.

At that point, as mentioned in the book Ohelei Tzaddikim, Rabbi Chaim’s son, Rabbi Yechezkel of Shinova Zatzal, entered the house. His father said to him, “My son, I want to know this man’s shoe size. Please take off your boots and let him put them on. Tell us if he needs larger or smaller boots.”

Rabbi Yechezkel obeyed his father and removed his boots. The poor man tried them on and said, “Rebbe, they fit me perfectly!” Rabbi Chaim was very happy, and he said to his son: “You have merited a great mitzvah, my son! However you can’t remain barefoot. Go into my bed and wait.”

The poor man left, and it just so happened that a wealthy chassid entered the house and was shocked to see the son of the Rebbe in bed during the middle of the day. He approached and asked if he was sick. “Certainly not,” replied Rabbi Chaim for him. “However he doesn’t have any boots, and he can’t walk around barefoot!” The wealthy man immediately took some money out of his pockets and sent someone to purchase boots for him. Quite pleased, Rabbi Chaim said: “See! One mitzvah leads to another, an entire series of Jews coming together to form a chain of mitzvot!”

## In the Light of the Parsha

### Batya and Teva

It is written, “Pharaoh’s daughter went down to bathe by the river, and her maidens walked along the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and she sent her maidservant and she took it” (Shemot 2:5).

Our Sages affirm that Pharaoh’s daughter was named Batya. They deduce this from the verse, “His Jewish wife bore Yered the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco, and Yekutiel the father of Manoah” (I Chronicles 4:18). All these names have been understood to mean Moshe, the son of Yocheved (described here as “his Jewish wife”), and raised by Batya (the Gemara goes into detail on this subject). Regarding this verse our Sages say, “Rabbi Yehoshua of Siknin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: ‘The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Batya daughter of Pharaoh: “Moshe was not your son, yet you called him your son. You as well, although you are not My daughter, I will call you My daughter” – even as it is said, “These are the sons of Batya [literally, ‘daughter of G-d’]” ’” (Vayikra Rabba 1:3).

I’ve also noted that the name Batya is formed by the same letters as the word teva (“basket”), which evokes the basket in which Moshe was found. This is the same basket which Batya took to save him, and she merited this name because she risked her life in acting so honorably. In fact she was the daughter of Pharaoh, who had decreed the death of all newborn males, a decree that she herself did not obey. Now if Pharaoh had ever learned of this, he would have immediately executed her.

She was also given this name because her hand miraculously lengthened by several cubits so she could reach out to the basket.

There is good reason to highlight the magnitude of this miracle. Pharaoh did not know that this infant, according to his decree, should have been thrown into the Nile. Indeed, he grew up in Pharaoh’s own palace! Furthermore, the very name Moshe testified to his origins: He was given this name because Batya said, “I drew him [meshitihu] from the waters.” Despite all this, Pharaoh never imagined who this infant was, nor what he represented.

### Imitation

It is written, “Come, let us outsmart it” (Shemot 1:10).

Besides the simple meaning of the text, the Ba’alei HaMussar have explained that we must study the ways in which the evil inclination works and attempt to outsmart it, according to the verse: “Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies” (Tehillim 119:98).

The Ben Ish Hai provides us with a nice parable to explain this:

A sailor wanted to transport a load of hats that were located by the shore. When he put one of these hats on his head, some monkeys descended from the trees and snatched them so they could also put one on.

In anger, the sailor threw stones against the monkeys, and in return the monkeys threw fruit from the trees at him. The sailor then realized that these monkeys didn’t want to steal his things; they were simply imitating him.

In his wisdom, the sailor then threw his hat to the ground. Upon seeing this, the monkeys also threw their hats to the ground, at which point the sailor quickly gathered every hat and loaded them onto his boat.

The same applies to our fight against the evil inclination: If we distance ourselves from it, it will distance itself from us.

### Showing Kindness

It is written, “Moshe was keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law” (Shemot 3:1).

The Zohar cites Rabbi Tanchum as saying that Jethro was an idolater. Yet because he showed kindness to Moshe, the latter faithfully grazed his flocks in good pastureland.

In his book Me’il Tzeddakah, Rabbi Eliyahu Hacohen of Izmir is surprised by this, given that our Sages have explained the verse, “The shepherds came and drove them away” (Shemot 2:17) to mean that Jethro had turned away from idolatry.

Rabbi Eliyahu responds by saying that Moshe was not, in fact, aware that Jethro had turned away from idolatry. Nevertheless, he still cared for his flocks, for Jethro had shown him kindness.

Rabbi Eliyahu deduces the following lesson from this: “From here we learn the power of chesed. We must distance ourselves from ingratitude – even toward an idolater – and show him kindness.”

### Heavy of Tongue

It is written, “I am not a man of words, not since yesterday, nor since the day before yesterday, nor since You first spoke to Your servant, for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (Shemot 4:10).

In his commentary on the Torah, the Rashbam refutes the commonly accepted explanation of this response, cited by numerous Rishonim, according to which Moshe stuttered. The Rashbam asks, “Is it possible that a prophet to whom Hashem spoke face-to-face, and who received the Torah in his very hands, could have stuttered?”

According to the Rashbam, the expression “I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech” means: “I am not an expert in the Egyptian language, since I fled from there in my youth, and now I am 80 years old.”

For proof, the Rashbam cites what Hashem told the prophet Ezekiel: “For not to a people of difficult speech and heavy tongue are you being sent, but to the House of Israel” (Ezekiel 3:5). This certainly means that whoever was not versed in the language of the Egyptian palace was described as “heavy of tongue.”

### Prayer with Tears

It is written, “She opened it and saw him, the child, and behold – the youth was crying! She took pity on him” (Shemot 2:6).

Rabbi Yehudah said: Man’s fate depends in the last resort upon repentance and prayer, and especially prayer with tears, for there is no gate which tears cannot penetrate.

Here it is written, “She opened it and saw him, the child” – which means that the Shechinah, which always hovers over Israel like a mother over her children, and which pleads in her defense against her accuser, opened it “and saw him, the child, and behold – the youth was crying.” The Shechinah saw the “child,” the Children of Israel, which is called “a darling child” [Jeremiah 31:19], in remorseful tears, pleading with the Holy One like a child with his father, and “she took pity on him.”

– Zohar II:12b

## Men of Faith

Fulfilled to the Letter

Each year, Mr. Sami Gabai of Casablanca would participate in the Hilloula of the tzaddik Rabbi Haim Pinto, may his merit protect us. In 5763 he was standing there, before the grave of the tzaddik, shedding hot tears, for he had been married a long time but was still childless.

Sensing his tremendous pain, the faithful gave him a blessing that he would merit a son, and that on the following year he would participate in the Hilloula as a father. On the following year he arrived at the Hilloula, as usual, and when he left the cemetery he spoke to our teacher, Rav David Pinto Shlita, who gave him a warm welcome and said: “Thank G-d, you have good news. The blessing that the faithful gave you by the grave of the tzaddik has been fulfilled.” Mr. Gabai confirmed that his wife was pregnant, but asked: “Why has their blessing not been fulfilled in its entirety? I should have come here as a father, but that didn’t happen!” The Rav answered him with another question: “Do you know what Hebrew day it is?” Mr. Gabai replied, “Yes, it’s Shabbat, Elul 26.” The Rav responded, “Who knows, perhaps your wife is now giving birth? For if this holy community prayed by the grave of Rabbi Haim Pinto, his prayer must be fulfilled to the letter.” In the meantime, the prayers of Shabbat continued, followed by Seuda Shelishith. Mr. Gabai’s friends asked him what the Rav had said, and they also wished him Mazal Tov. At the end of Shabbat, the joy of the participants increased when word spread that Mr. Gabai’s wife had given birth to a son at exactly 3 o’clock in the afternoon, the very moment they had wished him Mazal Tov. It was a great Kiddush Hashem, for it had apparently been regular, ordinary Jews who had given him a blessing by the grave of the tzaddik, a blessing that was fulfilled and which resulted in a miracle.