



Moshe was dreaming again. He stood next to his father and brother by the eastern wall of the synagogue. This was a place of honor, for Moshe's father was the Chief Rabbi of Cordova, just as his father and grandfather had been. But Moshe was not praying. His eyes wandered.

A sharp tap on his shoulder made him look up guiltily. His father looked at him with a stern gaze, full of disappointment and sadness. Moshe knew it was because he, the eldest son, could not learn Torah.

Every day his father would give away precious hours to learn with him. But at the end of the lesson, he would just sigh and shake his head. Yesterday it had happened again. Moshe had been sent away from his lesson. His eyes stinging with unshed tears, he made his way to the kitchen where Batsheva, their housekeeper, was frying cakes in hot oil.

"Did it not go well today?" she asked gently. "Not everyone is cut out to be a scholar. Maybe you take after your mother's side of the family."

"You mean my mother's father, the butcher?" Moshe asked.

"Yes, but that's nothing to be ashamed of. Your grandfather was a kind, honest, and G-d-fearing man, as generous as the day is long. Little wonder G-d sent him such an honorable son-in-law as your father."

The congregation was already rising for the silent prayer. Quickly Moshe turned the pages, wondering if his father had caught him daydreaming again. Moshe bent his head in prayer--and came to the words "Grant us wisdom, understanding, and knowledge..."

The words seemed to spring at him from the page. Perhaps G-d would grant him wisdom and understanding so that he would remember every word, and his father would be proud of him. Moshe resolved to try. During the lesson that morning Moshe concentrated on his father's words, "And G-d said, 'Let there be light, and there was light.'" Light. Through the open window, Moshe saw his familiar world. The fountain glistened in the sun, palm and myrtle trees swayed over the patio.

"Moshe!" his father's voice cracked like a whip. "If you don't understand, at least you could look at the holy letters! Can't you follow where I'm pointing?" Moshe shook his head miserably, "I can't."

"You can't because you don't try! Enough! Get out of my sight."

For a moment Moshe could not move. His father's words pierced his heart like a spear. Then he ran. To the very outskirts of the town he ran. He threw himself into the cold, clear water of the river there, reaching with strong strokes into the soothing waves. Then, exhausted, he dropped onto the river bank and dozed off. When he awoke, it was night.

Where should he go now? His father had driven him away. Moshe found himself wandering toward the synagogue. In the shadowy depth of the ark, the Torah scrolls glistened in their silver mantels. Suddenly the cold, hard knot inside his chest loosened, and his eyes filled with tears. "Please G-d!" he whispered. "Give me wisdom! Open my brain and let me understand Your holy Torah so my father can be proud of me! Please, teach me Your Torah!"

One by one he kissed the glowing scrolls, and carefully closed the doors of the ark. Then as a feeling of peace flowed over him, he recited the Shema, curled up on a bench and slept.

Dawn poured through the synagogue window. Had he really slept the whole night in the synagogue? Moshe murmured Modeh Ani, thanking G-d for returning his soul. Then, he realized what he had to do next. He would travel to the Yeshiva in Alisena and learn Torah from his father's teacher--the great Rabbi Yosef Ibn Migash. He would study until he could return home and make his father proud.

Moshe washed his hands, said the morning prayers with feeling, and hurried to the marketplace. The large square was filled with farmers unloading their wagons. "Sir,

can you tell me which way is Alisena?" Moshe asked.

The farmer smiled. "That's just where I'm headed, son. You must be going to Yeshiva, little scholar that you are! Hop into my wagon."

The sun had already set when they finally reached Alisena. Inside the Yeshiva rows of men and boys were learning. "What do you want, boy?" said a tall youth smiling down at Moshe. "I, I came to learn Torah with Rabbi Yosef Ibn Migash," he stammered at last. "Come back when you are bar mitzvah. Now your mother must be looking for you." Suddenly a kind voice said, "Bring the boy to me. What is your name, son?"

"I am Moshe, son of Rabbi Maimon from Cordova."

"Ah, my student from Cordova! Your father sent you to learn here?" But the true story came out. When Moshe finished, he felt the lips of the tzaddik on his forehead. "May G-d bless you, my son!" Moshe felt a great weight had been lifted from him, and that something deep and good inside of him was opening up. Years later he would say that at this very moment, the wells of Torah wisdom were revealed within him.

Excerpted from a forthcoming novel from Hachai Publishing by Rochel Yaffe.

THOUGHTS THAT COUNT

on the weekly Torah portion

These are the names of the Children of Israel coming into Egypt (Ex. 1:1)

The verse says "coming," in the present tense, rather than "who came," in the past tense. For the duration of the 210-year exile in Egypt, the Jews felt as if they had just arrived in that land. They never adopted Egyptian ways and always considered their sojourn temporary. (*Ohel Yehoshua*)

And she saw the child, and behold it was a weeping boy (Ex. 2:6)

We can learn (and emulate) three things from a child: He is always happy, he is always occupied and never sits idle, and when he wants something, he cries. (*Reb Zussia of Annapoli*)

And Moses was shepherding the flock of Jethro (Ex. 3:1)

A young goat once ran away from the rest of the flock Moses was tending in the desert. Moses followed the animal into a thicket that hid a pool of fresh water. Seeing the goat drinking he exclaimed, "I didn't realize that you were thirsty. You must be so tired now." After the animal had quenched its thirst, Moses tenderly picked it up and carried it back to the rest of the flock. When G-d saw Moses's act of kindness toward his father-in-law's goat, He decreed that Moses was equally worthy of tending G-d's own flock--the Jewish People. (*Midrash Rabba*)

For I am heavy of speech, and heavy of tongue (Ex. 4:10)

The fact that Moses had difficulty speaking shows that his leadership was accepted solely because he carried G-d's message, and not because he was a skillful orator and master of rhetoric. (*Drashot Rabbenu Nissim*)



4:38 Candle Lighting Time

NY Metro Area
17 Tevet / January 17
Torah Portion Shemot
Shabbat ends 5:41 pm

Dedicated in memory of a dear friend of the
Lubavitch Youth Organization
Mr. David Yagoda OBM

L'Chaim

1857
17 Tevet, 5785
January 17, 2025

The Weekly Publication
for Every Jewish Person
יוסף תורה השלושים

Dedicated to the memory of Rebbetzin Chaya Mushka Schneerson
"To You I lifted up my eyes, You Who dwell in heaven" (Psalm 123:1)



LIVING WITH THE REBBE

from the teachings of the Rebbe
on the Torah portion

At the end of this week's Torah portion, Shemot, Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh to demand that he free the Children of Israel from bondage. Pharaoh answered them, "Why do you, Moses and Aaron, hinder the people from their work? Go about your own tasks."

Our Sages explain that Moses and Aaron, being members of the tribe of Levi, were not required to work like the rest of the Jewish People, and were exempted from the bitter decree of slavery. Pharaoh, in effect, asked the two of them: "Why do you involve yourselves in affairs that don't concern you? Let the rest of the Jews continue in their tasks, and don't disturb them."

Why did the Egyptians permit an entire tribe of the Jewish People to be exempt from the terrible bondage forced upon the rest? The Egyptians recognized that each nation must have its own leaders and teachers to whom the people could turn for spiritual guidance. Pharaoh therefore allowed the tribe of Levi to continue learning Torah and to disseminate its teachings among the rest of the Jews. It was accepted as a natural state of affairs that the spiritual authorities should enjoy a higher status and occupy an elevated position in society.

When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh to demand that the entire Jewish nation be allowed to journey into the desert to worship G-d, they were disputing this commonly held notion. Pharaoh, for his part, claimed that it was sufficient that the upper class, the clergy, be allowed to learn Torah and carry out Jewish ritual. Pharaoh was the original proponent of the separation of "church" and state. The Egyptian king did not object to the Leviim learning Torah; he did not seek to totally negate the spiritual and intellectual yearnings of the Jews. He merely sought to perpetuate the Egyptian world-view which saw the two realms of the religious and the civil as two opposing concepts.

As religious leaders, Moses and Aaron were allowed a certain amount of authority by the Egyptian regime, on the condition that they limit themselves to the synagogue and to the yeshiva.

When Moses and Aaron came to Pharaoh with their request, it was seen as a total contradiction of the existing world order. They claimed that the Torah's very purpose was to show man how to conduct his daily, private life, and that its laws were applicable to each and every facet of a person's existence. Moses and Aaron radically challenged the man-made division between that which belonged in the spiritual realm and that which was outside of religious law. The Torah is neither limited in scope nor reserved for a select few.

From this we also learn the duty incumbent upon every Jew to help other Jews, even if he is not personally threatened. Aaron and Moses were not content to remain within the secluded tents of learning if the rest of the Jews were not allowed to participate. Because of their self-sacrifice on behalf of the Jewish nation, they were ultimately successful in ending the Egyptian exile and leading the Jews to Mount Sinai.

Adapted from the works of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

The Burning Bush and the Tanya

By Rabbi Yosef Y. Jacobson

THE INAUGURAL VISION

Moses, shepherding his father-in-law's sheep sees a blazing thornbush. We read in Shemos. "The bush was burning in the fire but was not consumed. Moses said to himself, 'I must gaze at this great sight--why isn't the bush burning up from the flames?'" G-d reveals Himself to him, saying: "Don't approach here. Remove your shoes from your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy soil." He then speaks to Moses, identifying Himself as the G-d of your fathers, and charging him with the mission of leading the Jewish people to redemption.

THE THORNS IN THE FIRE

Since this revelation was the genesis of Moses's appointment as the leader of Israel, this vision captures one of the common dilemmas in the life of the Jew and indeed of every searching human being.

The story of the burning bush which would not consume the thorns embodies the duality in every heart. On one hand, we experience a desire to be good and moral. But then, at other times, we are mundane and careless, overtaken by ugly emotions.

DOUBT

Moses, the first and greatest Jewish teacher, approaches the thorn bush. He has one question: "Why does it not get consumed?" How is it possible, Moses wonders, that if a person's spirituality is authentic, it has no bearings on his or her thorns?

G-d responds: "...the place upon which you stand is sacred soil." You must encounter the holiness in your present situation.

Then G-d continues to tell him: "I am the G-d of your father." I am present in the midst of this thorny bush.

THE TANYA

This notion is one of the central themes of the Tanya--the magnum opus of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, the founder of Chabad, known as the Alter Rebbe (1745-1812), whose passing will be marked on the 24th of Teves.

The Alter Rebbe termed his work: Sefer shel Banunim, which means The Guidebook for the Ordinary Person.

Who is the banuni? The banuni is a person who possesses in a conscious way a duality--not like the tzadik, who has achieved moral perfection. The banuni operates on two levels of consciousness. His life constitutes a struggle between good and evil.

Here is the Tanya's profound idea--all based on that vision of the burning bush. Never doubt the potency and authenticity of your inner holiness and Divinity, just because there are ugly thoughts still lingering in your brain.

G-d does not want you necessarily to attain the spiritual perfection of the tzadik, the toxic-free person. The hero of the Tanya is the banuni: he opens up a door for every human being in every situation and on every level to connect and become true servants of G-d.

I would say that the entire Tanya is based on that single passage G-d told Moses: "for the place upon which you stand is holy." Wherever you are, you can find holiness and develop a real relationship with the Almighty.

Moses wants to approach the fire. We all want to transcend our conditions and become Divine. So G-d says, no! You must realize that holiness is where you stand today! To be a Jew means that wherever you are in life, you can become a conduit for the Infinite and bring heaven down to earth.

