

**Parshat Shemot**  
**The Path to Redemption**  
**Rabbanit Tali Schaum Broder - Class of 2019**

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The screams increased as I approached. There were sounds of objects being thrown. It was all a bit terrifying, and I wanted more than anything to turn and run the other way. But I had been sent. The call had come into the chaplain's office, this time from the staff, because they were having a nightmarish time trying to deal with this patient. My friend, the Buddhist chaplain, handed me the referral, "They need someone to make things better, to calm her," he said. "You're a calming presence. You should go."

And so there I was, walking in trepidation to the room. When I entered, I saw the patient lying in bed, screaming at her sister, her aunt, and her nurse. I hesitantly offered a hello, telling her I had come to check in to see how she was doing and if I could provide her with any support. At first, she just stared at me, not believing that someone might come in and speak gently to her. Seeing my sincerity, she proceeded to open up. I took her hands in mine, and looked her in the eyes, as tears started running down her cheeks. She started telling me about the pain she was in, her anxiety and fear of being so sick that she would die. I sat there with her, mostly in silence for about half an hour as she divulged much of the depths of her anguish. Before I left she asked to see me again and she seemed to be in much less distress.

Walking out of her room, I knew that I did not perform any magic to change her from being terrified and angry to being much more calm and collected. All I did was to look deeply into her eyes, to arouse my own compassion for her. That made all the difference.

In *parshat* Shemot, the daughter of Pharaoh comes to the river to bathe. She sees a basket with baby Moshe floating in the river and she rescues him.

The Torah says:

ותפתח ותראה את הילד והנה נער בוכה, ותחמל עליו ותאמר מילדי העברים זה  
She opens [the basket], **sees** the child, and behold he is crying and she has  
**compassion** on him...(Shemot 2:6)

As the daughter of a king, she definitely did not need to be taking care of a Jewish baby boy, the very object of her father's wrath. She was out of her comfort zone, but she did it anyway. What was it that she saw?

Rashi, quoting the Midrash, says that what Bat Pharaoh saw was the light of the *Shekhina* (Divine Presence) that was with baby Moshe. I'd like to suggest that, perhaps, by really looking into the baby's eyes, by connecting with the child, she was able to see the **צלם אלוקים**, the Godliness that resided within him. Seeing those sparks of Godliness moved her to feel compassion and then to take action to save baby Moshe.

Baby Moshe grows up in the palace, living a privileged childhood. All we know from the text of the Torah, though, is that Moshe was shown compassion as a baby by Bat Pharaoh when she rescued him, and by his own mother who looked at him when he was born (Shemot 2:2 - **ותרא אותו**), and saved him.

The next thing we hear about Moshe is

**ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלותם**

When Moshe grew up, he goes out to his brethren, and looks upon their burdens.  
(Shemot 2:11)

Here, too, the language is clear - **וירא** - Moshe **sees** their pain. Malbim comments that Moshe looks at them with eyes of compassion and his heart aches. He not only sees them and feels compassion, but just as his mother and Bat Pharaoh did, he takes compassionate action. Malbim adds that these are some of the traits of Moshe's greatness that lead to his being chosen as the leader of the Jewish people.

Let's look back to the first time in our *parsha* where we encounter the word **ראה**. The Torah says,

...ויאמר בילדכן את העבריות **וראיתן** על האבנים ואם בן הוא והמיתן...  
[Pharaoh commands the midwives:] "When you are birthing the Jewish women, **look** at the birthstool...and kill the males." (Shemot 1:16)

They are commanded to see...and to kill. **Looking** at the birth stool would mean they would not see into these new mothers' eyes.

And what do the midwives choose to do?

ותיראן המילדות את האלוקים ולא עשו כאשר דבר אליהן מלך מצרים (Shemot 1:17)

This is classically translated as "the midwives feared God (from the root **ירא**) and did not do as Pharaoh commanded." However, given our understanding of the meaning of **ראיה**, of seeing, I'd like to offer another interpretation.

Perhaps we can say that "ותיראן המילדות את האלוקים" means that these midwives **saw God**—in the women they were birthing and in the babies they were helping to deliver. They did not look down at the birthstool (as Pharaoh had commanded), but instead looked up into the eyes of the mothers. In seeing God in these people, they could not possibly do what Pharaoh had commanded them and kill the baby boys. They felt compassion and allowed the baby boys to live.

Each of these figures in the beginning of Shemot offers us a moral way of looking at the world. Each of them looks out from his or her comfortable place, and goes out of their way to really see – to look into the eyes of the other and to see the pain and suffering of

someone else; to look deeply and see the Godliness within; to feel aroused to compassion and then to take action.

In our own lives it is easy to see things from a distance and feel far-removed. Our heart strings might be pulled and we might feel compassion, but how often are we ready to go the extra distance to take action? To lend a hand? To give the homeless person on the street a sandwich instead of looking the other way? To open our eyes and hearts to another's pain and suffering? To feel compassion and to do something to alleviate it?

The compassionate actions of the midwives, of Bat Pharaoh, of Moshe's mother, and of Moshe himself, reverberated on high. When *Bnei Yisrael* cried out to God, God heard their cries, and remembered the covenant. The Torah says

וִירָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים

God **saw** Bnei Yisrael and God knew. (Shemot 2:25)

God saw us in our pain and anguish, and had compassion on us. As Onkelos paraphrases aptly on this verse, "God determined to redeem them." It is then that God chose to take action, and to let the redemptive process begin. Seeing leads to compassion, which leads to redemption.

We should all be blessed to really **see** those around us and recognize the Divine within each individual. Instead of turning *away*, let us *turn toward*. Let us reach out in compassion and, in so doing, let us help move this world a little closer to complete redemption.



Rabbanit Tali Schaum Broder dreamt of the rabbinate as a child growing up in the HIR- the Bayit. After gap-year study in Israel, Tali made aliyah and earned degrees in Educational Counseling and Tanakh from Bar Ilan University. She studied for two years at the Women's Beit Midrash in Migdal Oz. Tali tutored at-risk youth in Jerusalem and was a guide at the Herzl Museum. She received certification in couples' counseling and teaching Hilkhot Niddah. Tali returned to Riverdale to study at Maharat. She served as a chaplain intern at Columbia and Weill-Cornell, and rabbinic intern at The National Synagogue and the Bayit. Tali also served for two years as a Chaplain resident in NYP - Columbia University Irving Medical Center, working in the Medical ICU, and oncology units, during the height of the COVID 19 pandemic. She was honored by the Hebrew Free Burial Association with the "Oskim B'tzibbur" award. Tali moved back to Israel with her family, with dreams of improving the spiritual care world in Israel. She lives in Tzur Hadassah with her husband Yechiel, and their daughters Ayala and Lilach.