YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**Parashat Shemot**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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Dedicated by Cheryl and Richie Broth and Stefanie and Yitzchak Etshalom
in honor of the marriage of their children, Yoni and Ariella

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Dedicated in memory of my grandmother,
Szore bat Simen Leib (Weinberger) *z”l*,
whose *yahrzeit* is on the 18th of Tevet.
May her soul be among the Righteous in Gan Eden.

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**Moshe’s Upbringing: The Absolute Readiness to Fulfill the Word of God**

Summarized by Shmuel Fuchs

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction: Moshe vs. Bilam**

At the beginning of the book of *Shemot* we meet the people of Israel for the first time as a national entity and not merely a set of individuals. We are also introduced to a new character, one who will accompany the people throughout the rest of the Torah – Moshe Rabbeinu.

The Torah testifies that "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moshe" (*Devarim* 34:10), and *Chazal* explain that Moshe merited to see through a "clear glass" (*Yevamot* 49b), that is to say, he received the word of God directly, and passed it on in its pure form.

However, *Chazal* also inferred a surprising caveat from the verse’s wording: "‘There has not arisen in Israel’ – but among the nations of the world, there has arisen" (*Sifrei Devarim Vezot Ha-berakha* 357), and they explained that the wicked Bilam equaled Moshe in his prophecy. On the face of it, this is astonishing: How is it possible that the wicked Bilam would equal Moshe in his prophecy?

We can answer this question with the following analogy: The prophet Bilam can be compared to a kind of funnel; God's word reaches him and passes through him as it is, without any effect on or from him. Bilam himself is an empty vessel, with no positive attributes that would affect his understanding of the word of God.

But now the opposite question arises: How did Moshe merit this type of prophecy, to convey God's word in a pure and clear way without leaving any personal "touch," despite all his individual qualities?

**Miriam and Batya**

To understand the uniqueness of Moshe, one must go back to the beginning of his life, to the environment in which he grew up. To this end, we will begin with *Chazal's* exposition of the verse: "And his sister stood afar off, to know what would be done to him" (*Shemot* 2:4):

"And she stood" – Rabbi Yitzchak said: This verse is entirely about the *Shekhina*. "And she stood" – as it is written: "And the Lord came and stood, and called as at other times" (I *Shmuel* 3:10). "His sister" – as it is written: "Say to wisdom, you are my sister" (*Mishlei* 7:4). "Afar off" – as it is written: "From afar, the Lord appeared to me" (*Yirmeyahu* 31:2). "To know" – as it is written: "For the Lord is a God of knowledge" (I *Shmuel* 2:3). "What" – as it is written: "What does the Lord your God require of you" (*Devarim* 10:12). "Would be done [יעשה]" – as it is written: "For the Lord will certainly make [יעשה] my lord a sure house (I *Shmuel* 25:28). "To him [לו]" – as it is written: "And he called it [לו] Adonai Shalom" (*Shoftim* 6:24). (*Yalkut Shimoni* 166)

This powerful *midrash* emphasizes the providence that Moshe merited when he was placed alongside the river. On the face of it, the *midrash* veers from the plain meaning of the verse, which seems to be describing Miriam's watching over her brother. But there is really no difficulty, and both approaches are correct. *Chazal* understood that Miriam did not stand there by herself, but rather together with the *Shekhina*, in order to look out and see what would happen to Moshe. From this we see that Miriam and the *Shekhina* wereworking in the same way.

Concern about the fate of Moshe in particular, and of the people of Israel in general, characterized Miriam even before Moshe was born, as described in another famous *midrash*:

It was taught: Amram was the greatest of his generation. When he saw that Pharaoh had said: "Every son that is born [you shall throw him to the river]" (*Shemot* 1:22), he said: We labor in vain. He arose and divorced his wife, [and then] they all arose and divorced their wives.

His daughter said to him: Father, your decree is more severe [than that of Pharaoh], for Pharaoh decreed only against the males, whereas you decree against the males and the females. Pharaoh decreed only about this world, whereas you decree about this world and about the world-to-come. Regarding the wicked Pharaoh, there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or will not be fulfilled, whereas you are righteous and your decree will [certainly] be fulfilled, as it is stated: "You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established to you" (*Iyov* 22:28).

He [= Amram] arose and took his wife back; and they all arose and took their wives back.

"And he tookto wife a daughter of Levi" (*Shemot* 2:1). It should have said: "And he took back"! Rather, this teaches that he acted toward her as though it had been the first marriage; he seated her in a palanquin, Aharon and Miriam danced before her, and the administering angels proclaimed: "A joyful mother of children" (*Tehillim* 113:9). (*Sota* 12a)

Following Pharaoh's harsh decree, Amram despaired of the fate of the people of Israel: "Why have more children if they will die anyway?" But Miriam urged him to act differently, to do his part and to challenge God, as it were, to fulfill His part in the matter. The expression "you are righteous and your decree will [certainly] be fulfilled" refers to the principle that "a righteous person decrees and God upholds," and thus we understand that Miriam demanded from Amram that he take action so that God would be "forced," as it were, to save His people.

A similar willingness to act on behalf of the people of Israel, without worrying about the personal interests of the individual, finds expression in Moshe's family in another context as well: the midwives who disregarded Pharaoh's orders and allowed the Jewish male children to live. The Sages disagree (*Sota* 11b) whether these midwives were Yocheved and Miriam her daughter, or Yocheved and Elisheva her daughter-in-law. But either way, we see that the environment in which Moshe grew up was characterized by dedication on the part of each individual to try as hard as he could to act for the good of the people of Israel, with the hope that God would send His help.

The next character in Moshe's life, Pharaoh's daughter, stands out for exactly the same quality. Like the midwives, Batya (her name according to *Chazal*; see, for example, *Kalla Rabbati* 3, 3) was faced with the decision whether to obey the decree of the king (who, in her case, was also her father) or to show compassion to the child before her and save him. Rashi cites a *midrash* that says Pharaoh's daughter found Moshe on the day she went down to the river to immerse herself and undergo conversion; to change from "the daughter of Pharaoh" to "the daughter of God" (*bat Y-a*). Thus, Moshe was saved by a woman who sacrificed her standing and her personal comfort, and chose to walk in the way of God.

**Conclusion**

We saw how Moshe's character was shaped from a young age around one principle: to see what God wants from you, and to do it in the best way possible; to refrain from thinking about one's personal interests, focus on what will benefit the people of Israel, and listen to the word of God.

We can now offer an answer to the question we raised at the beginning: How did Moshe merit the ability to serve as a conduit for the transmission of the word of God "through him," without any personal interest, despite his many virtuous qualities? Now it becomes clear that all of Moshe's upbringing fashioned Moshe's personality and qualities so they would be directed towards God alone.

The conduct that Moshe saw in his environment, of sacrifice for the benefit of God and neglect of personal matters, refined his personality and qualities and made him the most appropriate vehicle to pass on the word of God. Not because he did not have an effect on that which passed through him, as was the case with Bilam, but because all of Moshe's character and attributes were dedicated to this very matter: to understand and pass on the word of God in the best possible way.

[This *sicha* was delivered on Shabbat *Parashat Shemot* 5781.]