



סגירת מעגלים Closing Circles

■ “She Hid Him”

The homiletic teachings of our Sages of the Medrash are comprised of two elements: The open, above-board parts, and the hidden, deeper aspects. The former are the “story” parts of the Medrash, those that grab the attention and interest of the passing reader. But the next level up is that of the hidden fundamental principles embedded in the Medrash, containing treasures of information enriching and uplifting those who seek them out.

For instance, regarding King Pharaoh’s famous murderous edict against the Jews – *“Every boy who is born, throw him into the river”* (Sh’mot 1,22) - the Medrash teaches:

Why was it decreed that the baby boys must be thrown into the river? Because Pharaoh’s astrologists saw that the downfall of Israel’s savior would be through water, and they thought he was to drown. But they were mistaken; it was not *via* water, but *because* of water that he was decreed to die. When Moshe hit the rock for its water instead of speaking to it, G-d told him that he would die before the entry to the Land of Israel (Bamidbar 20,12): *‘Because you did not believe in Me to sanctify My Name before the Children of Israel.’* (Sh’mot Rabba 1,18)

The story appears to be telling us the evil intentions of the Egyptians and their crucial mistake. But the hidden, precious treasure in this teaching of the Sages is something totally different: It is the parallel they drew between the beginning of Moshe’s life and the end of his days. They informed us of the closing of a complete circle, as follows:

Moshe entered our lives from the water – the waters of the Nile, as Pharaoh’s daughter said when she named him: *“For from the water m’shitihu, I drew him out”* (Sh’mot 2,10). And he was also taken from us because of water –

in the place called Mei Merivah, the Waters of Contention, where he was punished for not having sanctified G-d's Name by following His instructions to speak to the rock for its water.

The Sages thus illuminate the aspect of “circle closing” perfection in the character of our Master of Prophets, who died on the same date on which he was born. He “filled out his days and years” not only in terms of his age, but in other ways as well. Moshe Rabbeinu symbolizes, for us, the perfection of the circle of life.

■ Behold, a Crying Lad

Let us consider the following circle-closing in Moshe's life. When Pharaoh's daughter opens the little box in which Moshe was hidden amidst the water and reeds, she finds a baby crying. She immediately identifies him as one of the “Hebrew children:”

וַתִּפְתַּח וַתִּרְאֶהוּ אֶת הַיֶּלֶד, וְהִנֵּה נֹעַר בֹּכֶה,
וַתַּחֲמַל עָלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר, מִי־לֵדֵי הָעִבְרִים זֶה.

*She opened [the box] and saw the child, and there was a lad crying,
and she had compassion upon him, and said:
“He is of the Hebrew children.”* (Sh'mot 2,6)

Note the switch: First she sees a “child,” and then he is a “lad.” Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, once Israel's Chief Rabbi and now Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, explained this most remarkably: Pharaoh's daughter sees a child before her - but when she sees him crying, she notes that this is the crying of a grown lad; he did not howl or screech, as babies often do, but rather cried silently. She sees the tears of the baby Moshe - and realizes that he is weeping soundlessly like a lad. This was why she discovered the crying only after she opened the box. The Hebrew babies learned to cry quietly, in order that the police searching house-to-house would not find them.

This explanation is bolstered when we consider the fact that later on, Moshe was wont to “cry out” for the People of Israel. For instance, at the Red Sea, “*G-d said to Moshe: ‘Why do you cry out at Me? Speak to the Children of Israel and have them travel!’*” (Sh'mot 14,15)

The same is true when Moshe prayed to Hashem during the Ten Plagues: “*Moshe cried out to Hashem, regarding the frogs that He had brought upon Pharaoh*” (8,8). Moshe also raised his voice and cried out for his sister Miriam's health: “*Moshe cried out to G-d, saying: G-d, please heal her.*” (Bamidbar 12,13)

This form of prayer represents Moshe's total identification with the subject of his prayer, and he thus screams out from the pain. It is a prayer that comes from deep within his soul.

On the other hand, shortly before his death, he pleads with G-d to allow him to enter the Land of Israel – but without raising his voice: וַאֲתַחֲנֶנּוּ, “*I pleaded with G-d at that time, saying: ... Allow me to pass, please, and see the good land on the other side of the Jordan*” (D'varim 3,23-25). We hear no crying out; just silent weeping accompanying the plea to fulfill his life's dream. Closing yet another circle in Moshe's life, this silence is reminiscent of his silent crying, like a “lad,” when Pharaoh's daughter found him in the box.

This silent weeping comes to teach us who Moshe Rabbeinu really is. As we read in the last verses of the Torah (D'varim 34,5), Moshe is *Eved Hashem*, the servant of G-d. His loyalty to G-d knows no borders, and he submissively accepts the decree that he will not enter the Land of Israel – with pain, but without complaining.

■ She Opened, She Saw

Let us return to the above-quoted verse: “*She opened [the box] and saw him, the child, and there was a lad crying.*” It appears to be redundant. Instead of, “*She saw him, the child,*” why should it not say simply, “*She saw the child*”?

Based on this question, the Talmudic sage R. Yosi ben R. Chanina explains (Sotah 12b) that the verse has a deeper meaning, and that she actually saw the Divine Presence, the Shechinah, with the child. R. Yosi explains that the word וּתְרָאוּהוּ, meaning literally “*she saw him,*” must be read in two parts: וּתְרָאוּהוּ: First “*she saw,*” and then the letter וּוּ, standing for G-d Himself. She thus saw G-d's presence with the boy.

But this is not so clear. Is it really possible for a mortal person to see the Divine Presence? Was Pharaoh's daughter, of all people, on a loftier spiritual level than was Moshe Rabbeinu, who, at the height of his spiritual prowess, was told, “*You will not be able to see My face*” (Sh'mot 33,20)?

The answer, of course, is negative - and so, in order to understand R. Yosi, we must consult the Sages' teaching on the following verse:

וַיּוֹצֵאֵנוּ ה' מִמִּצְרַיִם בְּיַד חֲזָקָה וּבְזֵרַע נְטוּיָהּ וּבְמָרָא גָדֹל...
*G-d took us out of Egypt with a strong hand,
 with an outstretched arm, and with great fear...* (D'varim 26,8)

The Sages in the Medrash Pesikta say that the last phrase, *with great fear*, refers to the revelation of the Divine Presence at the Exodus. This means that one of the ways in which we can sense G-d amongst us is via sudden “great fear.” This is not the only way, however. Batya, the daughter of Pharaoh, felt the Divine Presence when she sensed a wondrous Hidden Hand guarding the little baby and not allowing it to drown. This is what R. Yosi meant when he said that Batya saw G-d with the boy.

This special verse, ותפתח ותראהו, “*She opened [the box] and saw him,*” can also be seen as a parallel for a passage at the end of the Torah describing Moshe’s final days:

וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה מֵעֲרַבְתַּת מוֹאָב אֶל הַר נֹבֹ, רֹאשׁ הַפְּסָגָה אֲשֶׁר עַל פְּנֵי יְרֵחוֹ...
וַיִּרְאֶהוּ ה' אֶת כָּל הָאָרֶץ... זֹאת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וּלְיַעֲקֹב...

*Moshe ascended from the plains of Moav to Mount Nevo...
and G-d showed him the entire land... and said to him:
“This is the land that I have sworn to [give] Avraham,
Yitzchak and Yaakov...”* (D’varim 34,1-4)

Before Moshe’s death, G-d removes the curtain separating between Moshe and the Land of Israel. Moshe lifts his eyes and sees the longed-for land, always under the control and supervision of Hashem.

And this gives us yet another “closed circle” in Moshe’s life. The same revelation of the caring Shechinah that occurred when Moshe’s little ark was opened – ותראהו, *she saw him* – occurred yet again when the Land of Israel, under constant Divine supervision, was “opened” to Moshe at the end of his life, with the similar word ויראהו, *He showed him*.

■ Guarding from Afar

Let us return to Moshe’s little ark. His sister Miriam the Prophetess “*stood from afar, to find out what would happen to him*” (Sh’mot 2,4). She then made sure to bring her mother Yocheved to nurse him for Pharaoh’s daughter. Once again, this dovetails nicely with the end of Moshe’s life, 120 years later, when he stands before the entire Congregation of Israel at Mei Merivah and declares sternly:

שְׁמַעוּ נָא הַמְּרִים. הַמֵּן הַסֵּלַע הַזֶּה נוֹצִיא לָכֶם מַיִם?
*Listen, you rebels. Shall we then extract water
for you from this rock?* (Bamidbar 20,10)

Why was there a shortage of water? Because Miriam, in whose merit the Traveling Well accompanied Israel on its journeys, had died that very month – and the well stopped producing water. As is stated earlier in the same chapter: *“Miriam died [in Kadesh]... and there was no water for the congregation, and they crowded around Moshe and Aharon.”* (verses 1-2)

Miriam’s death left Moshe with no supervision, no one to “watch over” him. Precisely then, he finds himself in the eye of the storm facing a desperately thirsty nation – and he makes the mistake of his life by getting angry and hitting the rock, losing the chance to enter the Land of Israel.

Miriam had served as a bridge between Moshe and the nation, just like their brother Aharon the Priest – but Aharon stood between Moshe and the men, and Miriam was his go-between vis-à-vis the women.

We see the differences in their approaches during the Song of the Sea, immediately after the miraculous splitting of the Red Sea. Both Moshe and Miriam led the nation in singing – but while Moshe sang *אֲשִׁירָה לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֹה גָאֹה הָאֵל*, *“I will sing to G-d for He has triumphed over the proud”* (Sh’mot 15,1), Miriam exhorted the women, *שִׁירוּ לַיהוָה כִּי גָאֹה גָאֹה הָאֵל*, *“Sing out to G-d for He has triumphed over the proud.”* (verse 21)

The difference is that Moshe said he himself would sing, wanting the others to follow him and raise themselves up to his level – while Miriam encouraged the women to sing on their own level. Miriam was a calming influence. It is therefore likely that Moshe would not have spoken so harshly to the nation at Mei Merivah, when he called them *“rebels,”* had Miriam been alive then to “watch over” him.

We thus see that another circle in Moshe’s life was opened with Miriam watching over him – and closed when she was not there to do so.

And the final tightly-closed circle in Moshe’s life has to do with the calendar: He was born on the 7th of Adar, and died on the 7th of Adar. The Sages derive this from one of Moshe’s last statements: *“I am 120 years old today...”* (D’varim 31,2). The Talmud states (Kidushin 38a):

We know that Moshe died on the 7th of Adar. And how do we know that he was born on the 7th of Adar? Because he said, *“I am 120 years old today.”* Why does the Torah say *today*? To tell us that it was on that day that his years were completed – which means that G-d sits and fills the years of righteous people, to the day and to the month, as is written: *“I will fill the number of your days.”* (Sh’mot 23,26)

It is regarding this perfection of fullness and completion about which is said:

וְלֹא קָם נְבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה...

No other prophet like Moshe ever arose in Israel... (D'varim 34,10)

■ The Torah of Moshe

The Torah tells us that when Moshe was born, his mother hid him to save him from the king's decree: *"She saw that he was good, and she hid him for three months"* (Sh'mot 2,2). Just as he was concealed at the beginning of his life, the same was true at the end: *"No man knew his burial site, even until this day."* (D'varim 34,6)

Here we see the closing of another circle: Moshe's absence both at the beginning of his life and at the end. The Torah wishes to teach us that we must not concentrate on "Moshe the person," but rather on Moshe as a man of G-d who transmits G-d's word to us. Concentrating on his physicality as a human being could lead us to idol worship, as in fact happened to Bnei Yisrael in the wilderness just 40 days after they received the Torah:

קוּם עֲשֵׂה לָנוּ אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר יֵלְכוּ לִפְנֵינוּ, כִּי זֶה מֹשֶׁה הָאִישׁ
אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱלָנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם, לֹא יָדַעְנוּ מָה הָיָה לוֹ.

[The people said to Aharon:] "Arise, make us a god that will walk before us, for this man Moshe who brought us up from Egypt, we don't know what has befallen him." (Sh'mot 32,1)

They concentrated on "Moshe the man" – and ended up asking for, and worshipping, a Golden Calf. We must rather follow the directions as given by the last of the Prophets, Malachi:

זָכְרוּ תוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה עַבְדִּי אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִי אוֹתוֹ בְּחֹרֵב עַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל
חֻקִּים וּמִשְׁפָּטִים.

*Remember the Torah of My servant Moshe,
to whom I commanded in Horev [Sinai] laws and statutes
for all of Israel.* (Malachi 3,22)

The focus is not on Moshe, but on his Torah – the path of G-d in written form, transmitted by our nation from generation to generation. We must always remember and observe it, the Prophet tells us, for the Torah is our lifeline that preserves the Nation of Israel for eternity.

