

Maamarei Mordechai

הסביר לפי ממש פשט

Parshas Shmos 5786

Mordechai Schlachter

Moshe risked a great secret to help another Yisroel.

וַיַּפְנֵן פֶּה וְכֵה וַיַּרְא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיַּקְרֵב אֶת־הַמֵּצֶר וַיַּטְמֵן־הָיו בַּחַול:

“And he turned this way and that way, and he saw, because there were no officers (lit. man), and so he struck the Egyptian, and he hid him in sand.” (Shmos 2:12).

Moshe had to stand up for justice many times in his life. However, he never actually – physically – struck a man do death. When read literally, this pasuk certainly seems like Moshe killed the Egyptian. There is more the pasuk is teaching.

Moshe left the palace to see his fellow Hebrews. He saw that his fellow brethren were getting beaten by the Egyptian overseer. He saw one particular incident where an Egyptian struck, and likely killed, a Bnei Yaakov. This teaches that, in general, Moshe did not come across many Egyptian taskmasters who were striking Yisraelim. This incident was out of the ordinary, otherwise Moshe would be there all day dealing with Egyptian taskmasters. It could also be that while they may be whipped or prodded, this incident was more severe, more premeditated. It also was an important Yisroel, probably one of their designated Yisroel officers. (Ibid 5:14). Also, Moshe looked for another Egyptian overseer to inform him of this incident. (Ibid 2:12). When he found no one, he took matters into his own hands.

Then Moshe went out again, a different time. The pasuk says “day” but it could mean a period of time. There he saw two Yisroel men of importance – two Yisroel officers – quarreling with each other. When Moshe told them to quit it, the evil one retorted, “Who has placed you as an overseer, an officer, and a governor upon us? Shall you cause me to be killed, by oral report, just as you caused the Egyptian to did?” (Ibid 2:14). This retort frightened Moshe. Why?

If Moshe was a son of Pharaoh, a Prince of Egypt, who grew up in Pharaoh’s household, why would he be afraid of what a Hebrew, even an appointed officer, would think or do? Clearly a subjugated indentured servant of the Pharaoh cannot hold more sway than the prince himself.

The details are reveled in two words. First, how they warned Moshe. The pasuk adds the word אָמַר by verbal decree (lit. saying), at the end of “will you cause me to be killed.” The Torah is saying that Moshe did not literally strike the Egyptian and bury him in the sand. Instead, he issued his own oral decree by using his own princely power. That is why that word “saying” is in the pasuk. Just as you killed the Egyptian by oral decree, so too, you will decree on me and cause me to be punished.

Further, the word וַיַּטְמֵן does not mean buried as in, a grave. It means hidden. Treasure was hidden in the ground. (Yehoshua 7:21). Like hidden treasure. (Mishlei 2:4). Moshe did not bury him, dead. He demoted the overseer, subjecting him to a life in the

sand—the desert. Clearly, a life of poverty and hard labor. This is the “death” Moshe sent him to.

Second, is the word “man.” There are several words for man or person in the Torah. Adam, ish, enosh, gever, zachar, and ben adam. Often, the Torah will not give the generic word for man but use the pronoun “he.” The Torah could have written, “And he saw a Mitzry.” The word Mitzry is masculine, it would imply a man.

The Torah uses the word ish to connote a man of importance.

It is used in terms of a man who will engage in marriage. (E.g., Bereishis 2:23). In that way, it refers to a man of the household. It refers to men of importance. (Shmos 18:21). It also means one who engages in any sort of civil or criminal behavior. (Shmos 21:7). However, when left alone, it often means man of authority, like the Man Moshe (Bamidbar 12:3), and Noach, a Righteous Man (Bereishis 6:9). By the Dor Haflaga, no man—leader—could understand his fellow. (Ibid 11:7).

Often, thought, it means military might. Hashem is a “Man of War.” (Shmos 15:3). Eisav came with four hundred men. (Bereishis 33:1). Avraham was helped by three men when he engaged in battle against the Four Kings. (Ibid 14:24). These same three men visited him years later, when Hashem appeared to him at the Plains of Mamrei. (Ibid 18:2). Yaakov wrestled with a man—one of Eisav’s men—who advanced to the Yabbuk River. (Ibid 32:29). Yosef was met by a man—one of the men who joined the brothers in the sacking of Shechem—while he was looking for them near Shechem. (Ibid 37:15).

“And Moshe turned this way and that way.” He was not trying to see if anyone was watching. On the contrary, he was trying to see who this Egyptian’s supervisor was. It was unacceptable to strike down a Yisroel, especially a Yisroel officer. Turned also indicates that he left his path—he ended his tour of seeing his brethren to take care of this matter.

“And he saw, because there was no other man...” There was no other officer there. No one was supervising this overseer. No one to report to. The powers to be were turning a blind eye to the treatment of the Hebrews.

“And so, he struck the Egyptian.” The Torah adds the infinite ‘es’ to Mitzry. Meaning, it wasn’t just this Mitzry he was taking care of. He was ending intolerance by all overseers. He was trying to change policy.

“And he hid him in the sand.” He used his princely power and sent this overseer to work in the desert—a life of hard bondage, heat, and labor. Sand also indicates it was away from the lush and green Goshen, away from the Yisraelim.

What frightened Moshe was that it appeared this wicked man—who likely was quarreling about Moshe—clearly knew Moshe’s secret. Moshe was a Hebrew. Moshe’s mother never revealed this to Pharaoh. She had him nursed and then brought to her. (Ibid 2:10). She raised him. When he reached adulthood, he must have learned who he was. He went out looking to see his kin. The wicked man says, “Who made you an officer, prince, or governor over us?” A Hebrew would never talk to an Egyptian that way. Clearly, the man knew who Moshe was. He was asking, how can you be an officer, prince, or governor over us when you are Hebrew, too! Pharaoh made you important but you have no royal bloodline. I am going to sell your secrets! This is what Moshe feared.