

# SHABBAT LASHEM

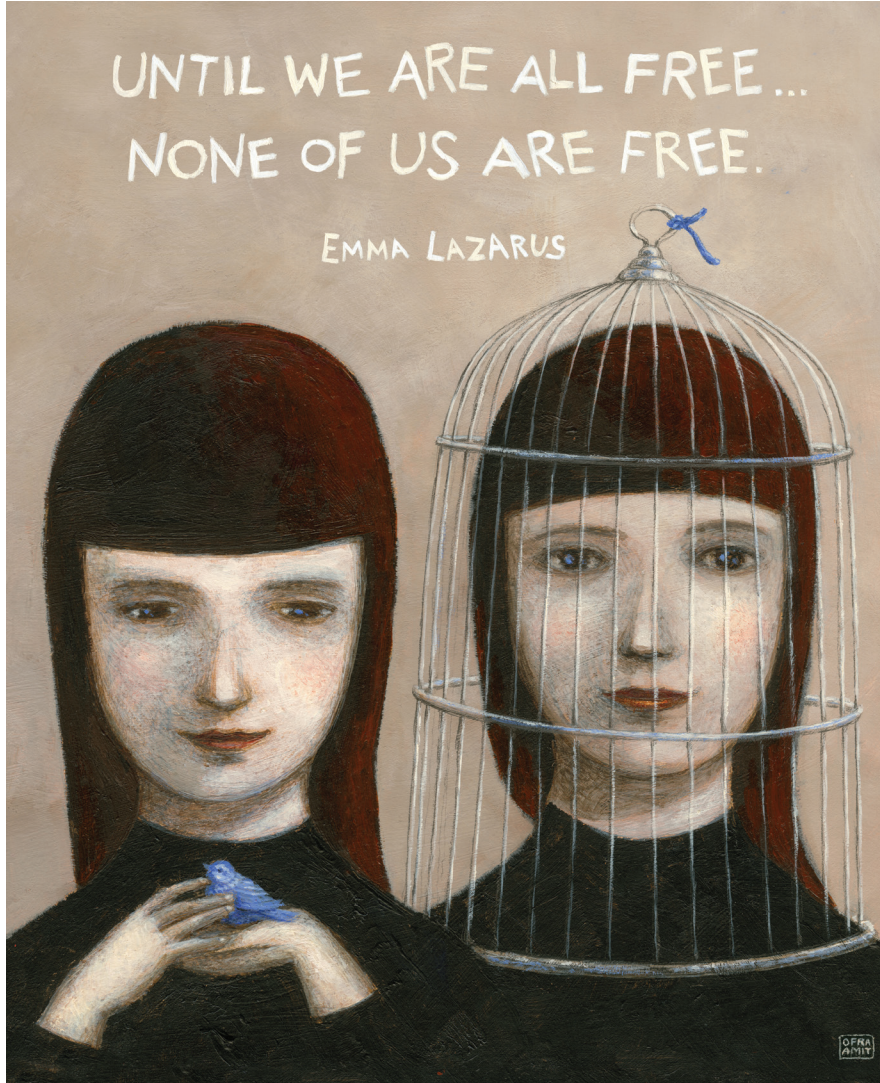
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## Parashat Vaera

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# Who am I? .....

## Rav Aharon Herskovitz | Rav Shaliach

In last week's parsha, we were introduced to Moshe. A running theme in the initial stories about Moshe is identity: to whom does Moshe more closely relate? As a child of Bnei Yisrael growing up in the house of Pharaoh, who is "as a son" to the daughter of Pharaoh (Shemot 2:10), this theme is thoroughly understandable, and appears to be developed in stages.

At the beginning, Moshe goes out of Pharaoh's house to connect (or reconnect) to Bnei Yisrael, with the Torah twice **emphasising the brotherhood** he felt with them (2:11):

And it was in those many days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and he saw their suffering. And he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers.

Moshe here leaves the complacency of the idyllic life in the home of kings, and goes out to connect to those suffering. Not just any suffering, but to the suffering of his brothers. **Even more so, he attempts to address that suffering with physical action, striking down the Egyptian and burying him.**

However, as a result of the negative response of other members of Bnei Yisrael, as well as Pharaoh's attempts to have Moshe killed, Moshe runs away. Rav Mosheh Lichtenstein points out that the crisis Moshe goes through does not relate just to the fear for his life, but the negative response his actions engender in Bnei Yisrael. **Instead of applauding his efforts to help alleviate their suffering, they castigate him.**

This crisis seems to affect Moshe's very connection to Bnei Yisrael, leaving them for perhaps more than 60 years. In the very next story, Moshe is identified not as a member of Bnei Yisrael, not as a Hebrew, but as an Egyptian. After coming to the rescue of the daughters of Yitro, they retell the story as follows (2:19): "An Egyptian man saved us

from the shepherds..." In the Midrash (Devarim Rabbah 2:8) Rabbi Levi criticises Moshe for this, explaining that Moshe did not merit to be buried in the land of Israel (as opposed to Yosef) for he "did not admit the land that he came from... (but rather) heard and was silent." Perhaps his silence stemmed from the fact that at this stage he preferred to be silent, to be perceived as being an Egyptian.

This question may be reflected in the name Moshe gives to his firstborn as well (2:22): "And she gave birth to a son and he called his name Gershom, for he said "I have become a stranger in a foreign land." The ambiguity in this statement is interesting: from what vantage point is the land of Midyan considered "foreign" for Moshe? It seems as though the "home" country that Moshe has been exiled from, and for which he is pining, is the land of Egypt.

After Hashem appears to Moshe and gives him the mission of speaking to Pharaoh and to take Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, Moshe returns to Yitro saying (4:18): "...may I please go and return to my brothers who are in Egypt and see if they are still alive..." Moshe frames his journey as a return to his brothers, as an attempt once again to reconnect with Bnei Yisrael.

While returning, we are told (4:24-25): "And it was on the way at the inn and Hashem met him and attempted to kill him. And Tziporah took a rock and circumcised her son and touched his legs and said "For you are a blood-groom to me." The delaying of the circumcision, for which Moshe is almost killed, may as well fit into this theme of Moshe's national identity at this stage.

This question of identity seems to come to a close in this week's parsha. After Moshe and Aharon have already appeared to Bnei Yisrael and Pharaoh once, Hashem commands them to do so again (6:10-13). Before this

command is executed, the Torah recounts the lineage of the eldest of Yaakov's three sons in order to eventually reach Moshe and Aharon, descendants of Levi (6:14-27). Commentators over the generations were bothered both the fact that this passage seems to be a break in the story, and also because of the fact that we've already been told the story of Moshe's birth and know his family!

I believe that part of the reason the Torah repeats the lineage here is to state emphatically that **Moshe has now fully embraced his role as a member of the descendants of Yisrael**. He will no longer be confused for "an Egyptian man", no longer seek to be a protege of spiritual leaders of other nations, but rather will be a member of Bnei Yisrael and their leader.

The Moshe that we encounter in our parsha eventually becomes not only Adon HaNeviim, master of the prophets, but also Moshe Rabbeinu, the teacher of the entirety of Bnei Yisrael. The development that Moshe goes through on a personal and national level gives added strength to the idea the Rambam

expands on in the Laws of Repentance (5:2): "Every person has the ability to be as righteous as Moshe Rabbeinu."

Moshe had untold legitimate excuses to not become who he eventually became: he grew up in the house of Pharaoh, where idolatry was the norm and causing suffering to the others was the way of life. He'd tried to do good, to intervene and ease the suffering of his brothers, and look at what it got him: a price on his head and the rejection of those to whom he sought to come close. He'd become used to the lack of connection with Bnei Yisrael, living for over 60 years in a foreign land surrounded by spiritual people who looked out for him. And yet, **despite all of these potential excuses, Moshe eventually becomes the one of whom Hashem says**

**"In all of my house he is the most loyal" (Bamidbar 12:7). Instead of being a victim of his circumstances, Moshe Rabbeinu becomes the archetype of what a servant of Hashem, a prophet and a leader are.**

May we all be inspired by Moshe Rabbeinu. Shabbat Shalom!

Pictured: Haroeh/Gimmel Machanot on Winter Machane 5778



# To Be Without a Name

Noah Haber | Boger Dvar Torah

It is quite striking that in Sefer Shemot - The Book of Names - some of the first characters to be introduced are nameless. Chapter Two begins with the story of a nameless man from the house of Levi marrying a nameless woman who gives birth to an initially nameless son.

In order to understand why these people are nameless it is important to examine the context in which this episode of the man from Bet Levi takes place. The preceding Pesukim of Chapter One describe the oppression and subjugation of Bnei Yisrael by the Egyptians. Pharaoh's rationale for treating the Bnei Yisrael this way is that he thinks they are too numerous and pose a threat to Egypt. In 1:10 Pharaoh declares to his people his intention to deal with this perceived threat by telling them "*Hava nitchakma lo*". This phrase is usually translated as "come let us deal wisely with them". However, as "*lo*" is the singular, a more literal translation of this phrase would be "come let us deal wisely with him". Perhaps Pharaoh's choice of language here reveals his approach to dealing with the Bnei Yisrael. By referring to the entire nation in the singular he demonstrates that he wants to turn the nation into a single entity, devoid of individuality.

This theory makes sense given that Pharaoh proceeds to turn them into city building slaves. To be put into large work gangs is a highly effective method of breaking down individual identity and creating an anonymous mass. Indeed, Rav Soloveitchik points out

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that when a single slave is bound to a single master, such as Yosef with Potiphar, it is possible for a relationship to develop, and for the slave to retain his individuality. It can be "a subordination but not necessarily a subjugation". In large scale slavery however "an impassive oppression precludes all human association", and individuality is broken down. This is the context of the episode of the man from Bet Levi. It takes place in an environment where there is no individuality, where people remain nameless.

It is clear however, that this is not an environment conducive to Godliness. Sefer bereishit ends with Yaakov blessing his sons. These blessings are given to each son individually, according to their own needs and strengths. This model of people using their individual strengths in the service of God while forming a larger collective is exactly what Pharaoh was trying to destroy.

Sefer Shemot is the book in which the Bnei Yisrael formally become a nation. Perhaps overcoming this attempt by Pharaoh to break down individuality was necessary before becoming a nation. In order to function in the best possible way as a nation, we need to realise that each individual has their own talents and strengths and their own path in Avodat Hashem. By forming a collective with all of these different strengths we are able to be part of something amazing.



# Dvar Halacha: Weekly Question .....

Have a question? Please email [rav@bauk.org](mailto:rav@bauk.org) or call Rav Aharon at 07976642135.

QUESTION FROM ASHER: IN OUR YOUTH MINYAN WE ACCIDENTALLY CALLED UP SOMEONE TO THE TORAH IMMEDIATELY AFTER HIS BROTHER HAD RECEIVED AN ALIYAH. WHAT SHOULD WE DO IN SUCH A CASE?

ANSWER: The Bet Yosef (OC 141:6) quotes two opinions regarding consecutively calling up brothers or a father and son to the Torah: one opinion (Orchot Chaim) believes that it would be problematic to do so. His reasoning is that they are not allowed to testify together, and since the Torah is referred to as testimony (תעודת), they should similarly not read from the Torah "together". The second opinion (Kol Bo and Mordechai quoting the Maharam MiRotenburg) believe there to not be any fundamental reason to oppose the practice, but practically do not allow it due to concerns

regarding "ayin hara", having physical or spiritual harm emanating from other people's seeing them be called up together and being jealous (a full discussion of this concept will have to wait for another time).

The Shulchan Aruch (141:6) records the second opinion, that there is no fundamental issue, but practically they are not to be called up due to concerns of ayin hara. This opinion is shared by the Rama. The Mishna Berurah (141:18) points out that since there is no fundamental issue, if the second brother has already been called up and he has already ascended the bimah he should read. The Shaarei Efraim (1:33) writes that if he has not YET gone up (even if he has been called up), he should not go up to read. Accordingly, the situation you described would change depending on whether the brother has already approached the Torah before anything was noticed as being amiss.

## Voices and Visions .....



### Cover Image Discussion | Poet: Emma Lazarus

Every six weeks for the coming year the Choveret will be a special bumper issue where we showcase some of the amazing art created for the Voices and Visions project. **The project is about using art combined with powerful messages to start conversations about Jewish identity.** Each of the pieces has been specially created for the project and is accompanied by a commentary text, biographies of the thinker and artist and questions to prompt discussion with family and friends.

The Pesach Haggadah opens with a paradox: "We were slaves in Egypt...now we are free," "Today we are enslaved; next year may we be free." We begin our Seder each year by stating the impossible: We are free, yet we remain enslaved. We are free insofar as we have escaped physical bondage. Yet, **we**

**are enslaved because we still depend on forced labour for our everyday goods.** We are enslaved because we know that we are fundamentally connected to the suffering and oppression of people across the world.

Today, slavery still permeates our society. An estimated 21 to 27 million people in the world remain in slavery. These slaves harvest our chocolate, sew our clothes, pick our vegetables, and polish our nails. They receive little or no pay, and are prevented from leaving through physical or emotional abuse. Slaves work in almost every industry and in every country, including the UK.

Our ancestors knew that freedom means not only the absence of physical bondage, but also the liberty to live according to our own values and ethics. That's why they went

## Voices and Visions - continued:

straight from slavery to accepting the Torah, with its system of laws aimed at creating a more just and divine world.

Today we cannot fully live by our ethics and values, because we depend on a supply chain so long and complicated that we rarely know when are where slaves are involved.

Therefore, the celebration of our own freedom must be accompanied by efforts to bring about the liberation of all people. The text of the Haggadah, like Emma Lazarus many centuries later, insists that until we are all free, none of us are free.

**About the Author:**  
**EMMA Lazarus**

(1849-1887) was an American poet who is most famous for the lines of her sonnet which appears on the Statue of Liberty. Lazarus studied American and British literature, as well as several languages. She wrote her own poems, edited many adaptations of German poets, and penned a novel and two plays. When Lazarus learned of the pogroms against Russian Jewry in 1881, she spoke out against the rising anti-Semitism, and strove to assist Russian immigrants in building new lives in New York.

**About the Artist:** **OFRA AMIT** is an award-winning Israeli illustrator whose works are featured in magazines, newspapers and children's books. She graduated from WIZO

Canada Institute of Design in Haifa, Israel and has been awarded many prestigious honours.

Look back at the cover image:

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

1. The artist repeated the same figure twice: how are they similar and different? Which one is the most free?
2. What is the role of the bird in the picture - visually and metaphorically?

3. Similarly, what role does the cage play both visually and metaphorically?

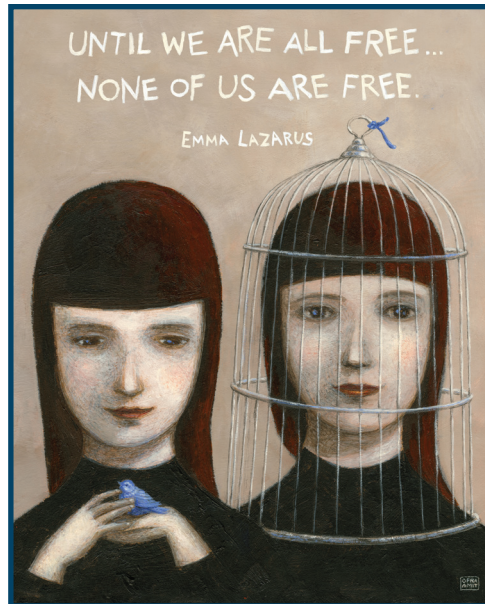
WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. The central Jewish narrative revolves around slavery and liberation. What role does the narrative play in your Jewish life and in how you think about your own Jewish identity?

2. How do contemporary examples of slavery affect you? In what ways do these realities make you

less free?

3. Have you ever felt the tension between your freedom and the lack of freedom of someone else? What did you do in that situation?



# Asylum Seekers in Israel - Update .....

Eli Gaventa | Chinuch Worker

This week Svivot around the country will be learning about the refugee crisis currently taking place in Israel and will be discussing the extent of our responsibility as Jews and Religious Zionists to help solve the crisis. In order to understand why I chose this topic for Svivot around the country please allow me to tell you about one key historical event, two facts I think are relevant, and one personal story of my own experience.

## THE HISTORICAL EVENT:

On the 1st October 1954 Israel became one of the first non-European countries to sign on to the 1951 Refugee Convention. The Convention is a very important piece of international law, created in response to the refugees from two world wars, that outlines what a refugee is and defines the basic rights afforded to them.

A refugee is a person who has fled armed conflict or persecution and who is recognised as needing of international protection because it is too dangerous for them to return home. The Convention's basic principle is that refugees should not be expelled or returned to situations where their life and freedom would be under threat. Once someone has been recognised as a refugee, they are supposed to be given access to social housing and welfare benefits and helped to find a job and integrate into society.

An Asylum Seeker is someone who claims to be a refugee but whose claim has not yet been processed by the state or country they are in. States are obligated under the 1951 Convention to consider all claims for asylum and to not expel or return the asylum seeker to a situation where their life and freedom would be under threat.

## THE TWO FACTS:

1) In Israel today there are 38 000 asylum

seekers from Eritrea, Sudan and other African countries. Of these 78% (27 500) are from Eritrea and 19% (7 900) from Sudan. Eritrea has one of the harshest dictatorships around the world and is a country in a humanitarian crisis. Citizens of Eritrea flee a country with no civilian judiciary, a country that never held democratic elections and whose citizens are obligated to perform endless national service. This service is unlike the service performed in other armies and includes performing various forms of forced hard labour for the benefit of the regime, including: mining, paving roads and agricultural work. They are made slaves to the state. Sudan has suffered through 60 years of conflict, political instability, genocide and drought. In 2003 hundreds and thousands of people were murdered and thousands more fled, becoming refugees across the world.

2) In the late 2000s asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea started arriving at the Negev Border in Israel. Upon arrival they were taken to Saharonim prison in the Negev, and then given a one way ticket to the Tel Aviv Bus terminal in the south of the city. Political rhetoric at the time branded them as 'infiltrators' and worse things. In 2012 Israel opened the Holot detention centre (open prison) and started detaining asylum seekers without trial and began a process of forcing asylum seekers to 'voluntarily' be deported to third party countries.

In 1954 when Israel signed the Refugee Convention we committed ourselves as a country to examining asylum requests from people claiming to be refugees, and to not return the claimants to a situation where their lives or freedom would be threatened.

Since 2003 Israel has granted refugee status to less than 1% of the Sudanese and Eritrean people in Israel. The rate of recognition around the world is 88% for Eritrean refugees and 64% for Sudanese refugees. And last week the Ministry of Interior in Israel announced

that asylum seekers would have 60 days to leave the country or enter jail. The Sudanese and Eritrean people in Israel, who have fled unimaginable suffering, are to be deported.

#### THE PERSONAL STORY:

In December 2016 I met Mutasim Ali for the first time. Mutasim lives in Israel and is a refugee from Darfur, Sudan. He is one of the only asylum seekers in Israel to have been granted refugee status.

In his journey from Sudan, Mutasim suffered the loss of his village, multiple arrests and terrible torture and being shot at by Egyptian guards until he arrived in Israel in 2009. Once in Israel, Mutasim tried multiple times but was unable to submit an application for refugee status until 2012. He spent a total of 14 months in the Holot detention facility and four and a half months in the Saharonim prison. Mutasim was eventually granted release from Holot and refugee status and today is a very prominent activist in the Sudanese community. He fights every day for the rights and better treatment of asylum seekers in Israel. When I met him I remember him saying that: "I really hope it will be a turning point for African asylum seekers, I really think Israel can turn asylum seekers into a contribution to this country."

However in response to the recent decision by the Government he recently wrote on Facebook: "I expected that the situation would get better. I couldn't have been more wrong. Fleeing persecution and death are not enough to enjoy safety and a dignified life. I am so frustrated. Not as hopeful as I used to be. I write this story sitting in a cafe and I am supposed to prepare for an exam tomorrow, but I cannot be focused, knowing that my friends' lives are in danger and are facing

deportation.

*I remind myself how much I have overcome and how far I have reached. I have never learned to stay silent. I am taught to resist the injustice anywhere. I am taught to use all the legitimate tools to ensure fairness and equality. Today I will say that, I am ready to risk my status if that's what it requires to stand with my friends and community."*

#### THE CONCLUSION:

An overwhelming priority of the Torah is that as Jews we should treat the strangers amongst us with dignity and respect, for we too have experienced what they have. (Shemot 22:20). We are told (Devarim 23:16) that "you shall not hand over a slave to his master" and the Sefer HaChinuch (Mitzvah 568) explains that this especially applies in Israel.

As Religious Zionists and as Bnei Akiva we have a responsibility to build a state that embodies the values of Torah and Chessed. We also have a responsibility to

challenge the state to be better when it fails to do this.

There are many people and NGOs in Israel, across the political and religious spectrum working to solve this situation. And it is certainly a crisis that is complicated and has lots of history behind. If you would like to discuss how we might contribute as a Tnua to help resolve the situation, if you have any questions or thoughts on this week's Shabbat Lashem or would like to would like to receive a copy of this week's Choveret please email [eli@bauk.org](mailto:eli@bauk.org).

Wishing you Shabbat Shalom,  
Eli Gaventa, Chinuch Worker

