

Parshat Shemot – Advice from a Child

By Rabbi Mayer Freedman



Pharaoh's astrologers informed him that a boy would be born who would redeem the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. He therefore enacted a new decree that all male newborns would be drowned in the Nile River. At this point in the story, the Torah tells us that 'A man went from the house of Levi and married a daughter of Levi.' This man was Amram. The 'daughter of Levi' was Jochebed.

The Talmud details the interesting background to this marriage. Amram and Jochebed were previously married. In fact, they already had two children, Miriam and Aaron. When Pharaoh legislated this new barbaric decree of killing every newborn male child, Amram decided that it was not worthwhile to continue having children; after all, if a boy would be born, Pharaoh's henchmen would find and kill the baby. He therefore divorced his wife. As Amram was the leader of the Jewish people at the time, all the rest of the Jews followed suit and divorced their wives. Miriam, who at the time was a mere six years old, understood the situation and recognized the obvious outcome of her father's decision: no more Jewish children. Disagreeing with her father, she presented him with the following three arguments as to why he should stay married:



1. Pharaoh's decree affected only the males, but Amram's decision affected the girls as well.
2. Pharaoh's decree caused the boys to lose out on *Olam Hazei*, the physical world, but by preventing their birth, Amram was causing them to also lose out on *Olam Habah*, the world to come.
3. Pharaoh was a king of flesh and blood whose decree might not even last, while Amram was ensuring that the decree would endure.

Amram accepted the advice of his daughter and remarried Jochebed. It is to this remarriage that the Torah refers in the verse, 'and he married a daughter of Levi.' This union resulted in the birth of Moses, the prophet who led the Jews out of Egypt. Because Amram considered and ended up listening to the advice of his six-year-old daughter, the Jewish people were saved.

There are two major lessons that this narrative teaches us. The first is that you can truly learn from everyone. Amram had made a decision which all of the Jewish adults chose to follow. No one had voiced any disagreement or complaint. It would have been very understandable for Amram to rebuff his daughter with the phrase we often tell our children, "When you get older, you will understand." But he didn't. The leader of the Jewish people listened seriously to what a six-year-old had to say, considered it, admitted that she was right, and followed her advice. And the amazing result is that the Jews were able to leave Egypt. Just imagine if Amram had ignored Miriam... We must make sure that we listen in a serious manner to the words of others, even though they may be less experienced with us. Each and every person has a different perspective and may be able to share an insight with us.



Another important lesson that this account illustrates is that everyone has something to offer. When community projects have to be undertaken, when leadership roles must be filled, or even when a letter to an editor or a congressman must be written, it is very easy for us to recuse ourselves based on a myriad of reasons that may very well be valid. We might not have experience in the particular area needed. We may not feel that we have the ability to devote the needed time. Our personalities might not be the right one to deal with that specific situation. We may think we don't have the skills to verbalize our position perfectly. One excuse after



another is available. Miriam teaches us that we really don't have an excuse. If something has to get done, if something has to be said, it is our job to do it and it is our job to say it. What would the Jewish people have looked like if she had been too timid or felt too inexperienced to speak up? We must realize, as it says in Pirkei Avot, the Chapters of the Fathers, 'In a place where there are no men, strive to be a man.' When something has to get done, we must roll up our sleeves and dive in head first.