

Shemos – Jonathan Sykes *(reprinted)*

כ"ג טבת תשע"ז – 21st January 2017 – שבת פ' שמות

This new sefer of Shemos is the beginning of the biography of Moshe Rabbeinu. It is in chapter 2 verse 2 that the greatest Navi is born, and it is here that I wish to review some fascinating insights from Gemorah Sotah 12a, which examines this event.

The Passuk states "The woman conceived and bore a son, and [when] she saw him that he was good, she hid him for three months."

Rashi explains the phrase "that he was good", based on Shemos Rabbah 1:20, and our sugya Sotah 12a that the entire house was filled with light.

Why is the birth of Moshe referred to as Tov? What is so special about Moshe as a newborn?

Is not the birth of any child good? What is the connection between light and good?

The Braisa regarding the usage of the term Tov describes this lashon in 5 ways:-

1. R. Meir "She saw that he was Tov (good)" - Moshe's name is Tov. This expression of Tov is linked as a gezerah shava to the term Va'yehi Tov in Bereshit, just as in creation when something was created it was considered Tov so to when Moshe came into existence it was Tov and hence this was his name.
2. R. Yehudah partially agrees with R. Meir yet he states that Moshe's name was Tuvya not Tov. An explanation of the difference between Tov and Tuvya is that in the case of Tov if something is innately good it is part of what defines it. With respect to Tuvya the goodness has to be worked on in order to draw it out. Perhaps a greatness of Moshe was that despite his seemingly pure status at birth, throughout his life he still had to work on himself in order to become more good. Hence his name Tuvya (Imrei HaYam)
3. R. Nechemyah says, the explanation of why Moshe was referred to as Tov is that his mother Yocheved saw that he was fit for prophecy;
4. Others say, he was born circumcised - this could explain Bat Paroh's reaction when she came across him in the river. She understood that here was a special child. He was born with the perfection associated with Brit Milah, completed, hence Hodu Lashem Ki Tov in the brit ceremony (Bal HaTurim)
5. Finally the Chachamim say, when he was born, the house was filled with light. A light ---- Moshe would enlighten the world – and this could be supported by the fact that Moshe was subsequently hidden by Yocheved – light and goodness are synonymous (Shemos Rabba) – There are many mystical/chassidic interpretation associated with this relationship.

One overriding factor about this Braisa is that Moshe is not known as either Tov or Tuvia but rather Moshe Rabbeinu, as named by Bat Paroh since she "drew him out of the water". This outstanding Chesed by the non Jewish princess of saving Moshe's life, and putting herself at risk, was deemed so outstanding that it could override any name/characteristic that Moshe was born with as stated by any of the Tanim in the Braisa. She has the Zechut of the greatest Navi being known with her name for all generations to follow. An act of chesed can have phenomenal implications, and the initiation of the greatness of Moshe was born out of one such act.