



SERMON RESOURCE FOR SHLUCHIM

DISTRIBUTION DATE:

TUESDAY JANUARY 4, / כ"ה טבת

PARSHA:

BO / בא

SERMON TITLE:

The Story behind Aishes Chayil

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman ז"ל ר' מנחם זאב בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.

BO

The Story behind Aishes Chayil

In 2009 a terrible earthquake shook Haiti and many countries sent aid to help Haiti and the victims. What was interesting about the world's initial response was that the second-largest aid contingent that went to Haiti to help was the group that arrived from Israel.

Here you have this tiny country that's hard to find on the map that bothered to send aid to Haiti. On the other hand, of the world's 57 Muslim countries, only Turkey sent a group, and a very small one at that. But there's more: the contingent from Israel was able to perform surgeries on site—something that not even the American contingent did.

Remember that this was the very same Israel that is constantly condemned by the entire world for a disproportionate response against Palestinians. Yet, no one in the world said a thing about Israel's completely disproportionate response to the tragedy in Haiti.

Now, everyone has heard of the song "Aishes Chayil," "A Woman of Valor," which is sung at the Shabbos table every Friday night and which was written by Shlomo HaMelech, King Solomon, in the Book of Mishlei, Proverbs. The reason we sing it is because it is an ode to the Shabbos itself, which is symbolized by a woman—specifically, the "Shabbos Queen."

But we can ask a question here: What inspired King Solomon to write these verses? What suddenly motivated him to write a poetic description of the "Woman of Valor," the ideal woman?

Now King Solomon, when he took the throne, immediately got busy with the building of the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. For seven years, Shlomo HaMelech built the Beis Hamikdash and all along that time, he also gradually established diplomatic relations with foreign kings and countries as far as Africa.

In that era, one of the ways two kings would establish diplomatic relations was through royal weddings—and that's how it was up to 100 or 200 years ago in Europe and in general. As a matter of fact, just a few years ago Australia and Denmark, of all countries, strengthened their diplomatic and trade relations. It happened because an ordinary young Australian named Mary McDonald met the Crown Prince Frederik of Denmark and today, not only is she known as Crown Princess of Denmark but she is the reason for a number of business deals between Australia and Denmark.

Back to Shlomo HaMelech.

King Solomon wanted to bring the entire world closer to the belief in G-d. For that reason, King Solomon converted many foreign princesses to Judaism and married them in the hope that this would attract them and their fellow countrymen to recognize G-d and His Greatness. As the Talmud Yerushalmi (Tractate Sanhedrin 2:6) tells us, "Concerning the verse that [states that] he loved heathen women... Rav Yosi says [that he did so] to draw them to the words of the Torah and to bring them close under the wings of the Divine Presence."

These ties reached their pinnacle with the marriage of the daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh to Shlomo Hamelech.

The Midrash tells us that on the very night they celebrated the dedication of the Holy Temple, they also celebrated the wedding of the Egyptian princess and King Solomon. As the Midrash states: "On the night that Shlomo completed the work on the Holy Temple, he married the Pharaoh's daughter, and there was heard jubilation for the Temple celebration and for the Pharaoh's daughter's celebration—but the joyous cries for the Pharaoh's daughter's celebration rose higher than the joyous cries for the Temple."

What the Midrash is telling us is that the crowd was more excited for the wedding than the Temple dedication—and that no one complained about it. Why? The Midrash tells us: "*kula mischanfin l'malka*"—everyone was flattering the king.

The Midrash (Vayikra Rabbah 12:5) adds to this, telling us that throughout the entire seven years during which he was building the Beis Hamikdah, Shlomo Hamelech was a Nazir. He had taken the Nazirite vow not to drink wine or cut his hair. But "since the Temple had been built and he had married the daughter of the Pharaoh, he drank wine that night."

After such a night, of course, the king went to sleep, and he put the keys to the Holy Temple under his pillow. His new wife the Egyptian princess closed all the shades so that the sun would not bother him the next morning. And indeed, the next morning, the entire Jewish nation got up early to bring the first-ever daily morning sacrifice in the Temple at the first possible moment.

But there was a problem—the king was sleeping. And it was now impossible to bring the sacrifice because the keys to the Temple were under the pillow of the sleeping king. "The Jews were depressed because it was Temple Dedication Day," the Midrash tells us, "and they couldn't do anything because Shlomo was sleeping and they were afraid to wake him up for fear of the kingdom." After all, who would have the nerve, the chutzpah, to wake up the king? And so, "he slept until four hours" into the day.

Now, just imagine how the people felt on that morning. Here the Temple had been worked on for seven long years—and when they finally finished building it in the month of Cheshvan, Shlomo Hamelech postponed the inauguration of the building for almost another year, to the following Tishrei, because he wanted to celebrate the dedication specifically in the month in which the patriarchs of civilization, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, were born. And so when they finally celebrated the Temple dedication in Jerusalem and wanted to bring the Tamid sacrifice, the first-ever daily morning sacrifice, the king was sleeping!

The Midrash tells us: “They told his mother, Batsheva, and she went and woke him and reprimanded him.” Who was the only one who could have the chutzpah to wake him up? The Queen Mother. And so she not only woke him up, but spoke very harshly to him, as the Talmud (Tractate Sanhedrin 70b) tells us: “Everyone knows that your father [King David] feared Heaven. Now they will say that his mother made him evil!” And Rashi adds: “They won’t blame your father... why cause them to mock you that you are my son?” He to whom all the world’s secrets are revealed drinks wine and gets drunk!” (Solomon was world-famous for being the “Wisest of All Men.”)

And so the Midrash concludes: “On that day, the Tamid sacrifice was brought at four hours [into the day].”

It was those words of rebuke by the Queen Mother that were the background story to the song Aishes Chayil. And the real reason that Shlomo Hamelech wrote it was because he was profoundly disappointed with the Pharaoh’s daughter, who had closed the blinds so that he would sleep in. She was turning out to be far from ideal, and so Shlomo wrote Aishes Chayil—“A woman of valor, who can find?” as if to say, “I wish I would have found her...”

But the Midrash adds something very interesting here. It says that King Solomon's lament over the daughter of the Pharaoh was not just referring to the current daughter of the Pharaoh whom he had just married, but the first-ever daughter of the Pharaoh in history—the one who had saved Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses, from the river.

And so now, we tie all this together as we come back to our Torah portion of the week.

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the Plague of the First-Born, in which all the first-born children in every Egyptian family died. As Rashi tells us on the verse (Chapter 12, verse 30) "For there was no home in which there were no dead," "The oldest member of the household was considered the first-born."

And the Midrash explicitly states that "even the first-born daughters died in Egypt"—except for one single first-born Egyptian girl. Can you guess who that was?

Basya, the daughter of the Pharaoh, who had found a defender who was good, and this was Moshe, as the verse states, 'And she saw him that he was good.' Therefore, King Solomon wrote, 'She senses that her enterprise is good, so her lamp is not extinguished at night.' "

And which "night" was King Solomon referring to? The Midrash ends, quoting our Torah portion (Chapter 12:29): "It came to pass at midnight."

So Shlomo Hamelech was really lamenting as he compared the 2 daughters of Pharaoh. The first daughter of the Pharaoh was so great because she had saved the life of Moshe, and the second daughter of the Pharaoh, his new wife, was, well, less than great because she wasn't turning out to be terribly responsive.

What we learn from Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh who rescued baby Moshe from the river, is that even when the entire world is murdering babies, she went against everything she had been taught, denied everything about how she had been raised, and risked her very life to rescue a Jewish child.

And this is why I stood up here talking about the Jewish response to Haiti—because it was Basya who became a one-woman legend of history by standing up to a mighty empire led by none other than her own father, rebelling against everything to do what needed to be done. It was from this spirit that the Jewish Nation was born—a nation that throughout history was very sensitive to the suffering of the other.

This, my friends, is why it is no surprise at all that Israel sent a huge rescue team to try to at least minimize a little bit of the suffering of Haiti's citizens. From the Exodus from Egypt to this very day, the Nation of Israel never lost its sensitivity to the suffering of other human beings. And for this we thank G-d.

The Rebbe always encouraged the popularization of the Seven Noahide Law simply to attract the non-Jews to faith in the One G-d. Perhaps the Haiti tragedy is a reminder to the Jewish People that our outreach and help to the world doesn't need to be only humanitarian but also, and primarily, spiritual.

Most importantly of all, the Jew must remember that his or her purpose in life is to spiritually change himself or herself, and the entire world around us all—and that there is no escaping this destiny, as the Rebbe would say.

A PROJECT OF THE SHLUCHIM OFFICE

The author is solely responsible for the contents of this document.

Sponsored by Shimon Aron & Devorah Leah Rosenfeld & Family
In loving memory of

Emil W. Herman אהרן בן פנחס ז"ל
who loved and supported Torah learning.