



WONDER WOMEN IN EGYPT

How were two midwives enough for an entire nation, why didn't Pharaoh punish them, and what reward did they receive?

TEACHER'S MANUAL



JEWISH INSIGHTS

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Shluchim of the Rebbe to Mumbai India

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Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, calls the Jewish midwives, Shifrah and Puah, and orders them to kill the newborn Jewish males. The midwives do not obey, and later tell Pharaoh that the Jewish women give birth by themselves, unassisted. As a reward for this, G-d gives them “houses”. Rashi explains that Shifrah and Puah are Yocheved and Miriam, and “houses” refers to the priestly, Levite and royal dynasties (Source 1).

The Rebbe asks: Why doesn't Rashi explain that the midwives were indeed called Shifrah and Puah, and G-d's reward was that he built them “houses” - large families? We have an example from the conclusion of our Torah portion where the word “house” is clearly used to mean “family” (Source 2).

B. Why Were Midwives Needed?.....11

When Rashi explains a verse in a Midrashic manner, it is because there is some difficulty in understanding the verse in the simple way. When reading this verse, two simple questions arise: (a) how were only two midwives enough for the entire Jewish nation? And (b) conversely, according to what the midwives told Pharaoh, that the Jewish women give birth alone, why were midwives needed at all?

These questions demonstrate that we were not talking about ordinary midwives, and the explanation of the Midrash makes this clear, as will be explained later.

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The Jewish women at that point in time did indeed give birth alone at home. The role of the midwives was to provide moral support - to calm and reassure the mother giving birth, that in case of emergency they would be there. But even for just the above role, two midwives would not suffice for an entire nation. Therefore, it must be that they were righteous women and very well-known, whose mere existence reassured and strengthened the women in this special mission - to give birth to more Jewish children. And these two women were Yocheved and Miriam.

D. Measure For Measure.....15

This question, however, remains, why does Rashi interpret the word “houses” as referring to the priestly, Levite and royal dynasties?

In a reality where every woman gives birth to six at one time, the fact that a woman has a large family does not constitute a special reward. They all had it. That is why Rashi needed to use the interpretation of the midrash, that the reward is special dynasties.

In another talk, the Rebbe explains in greater depth that the principle of the reward was measure for measure (Source 3). Through their actions, they not only assisted the birth of a large number of children, they built the future of the Jewish nation. That is why they received a reward of not only many children, but also the dynasties of the priests, Levites and kings of the entire Jewish nation (Source 4).

השיעור לפרשת שמות

משיחת ש"פ שמות, מבה"ח שבט, ה'תשמ"ו
הנחה בלתי מוגה
תורת מנחם ה'תשמ"ו חלק ב' עמוד 358 והלאה

A. What's Wrong with the Simple Explanation?

Overview

When Jacob went down to Egypt together with his family, they numbered seventy people. After the passing of Jacob and Joseph, the Israelites who lived in the land of Goshen multiplied and flourished, and filled the land.

A new king who did not know Joseph arose to rule over Egypt. He fears that the Jewish people living in his country will become an opposing armed force during a potential war, and therefore imposes hard labor on them. But his plan does not succeed. Rather, “as much as they would afflict the Israelites, so did they multiply and so did they gain strength.”

The astrologers predict that a Jewish boy will be born who will save the Jewish people. Upon hearing this, Pharaoh rushes to take action: He calls the Jewish midwives (Shifrah and Puah) and orders them to kill all the Jewish males who will be born. The G-d-fearing midwives do not obey his command, and when they are asked by Pharaoh why they didn't obey, they reply that the Jewish women give birth by themselves without any assistance.

Source 1 Exodus 1:8-21

The Problem Of The Egyptians

Student's
pg. 3

A new king arose over Egypt, who did not know about Joseph. He said to his people, “The nation of the children of Israel are more numerous and stronger than we are. Get ready, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they increase, and when a war befalls us, they will join our enemies and wage war against us and depart from the land.”

וַיִּקְם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל
מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת
יוֹסֵף. וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ הִנֵּה
עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם
מִמֶּנּוּ. הֲבֵיאָה נִתְחַכְמָה לּוֹ פֶּן
יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה
מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסַף גַּם הוּא עַל
שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה
מִן הָאָרֶץ.

The First Solution - Hard Labor

Student's
pg. 3

The Egyptians appointed tax collectors over the Israelites to afflict them with their burdens, and the Israelites built

וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים
לְמַעַן עַנּוֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם,
וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכָּנוֹת לְפָרְעָה

storage cities for Pharaoh, namely Pithom and Raamses. But as much as the Egyptians afflicted the Israelites, so did they multiply and so did they gain strength, and the Egyptians were disgusted with the children of Israel. The Egyptians enslaved the Israelites with back-breaking labor. They embittered their lives with hard labor, with clay and with bricks and with all kinds of labor in the fields, all the work that they made them do was crushing labor.

אֶת פֶּתֶם וְאֶת רַעְמִסִּים.
 וְכֹאֲשֶׁר יְעַנּוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה
 וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי
 יִשְׂרָאֵל. וַיַּעֲבְדוּ מִצְרַיִם
 אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרֶךְ.
 וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה
 קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבָנִים
 וּבְכֹל עֲבֹדָה בְּשָׂדֵה, אֶת
 כָּל עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ
 בָהֶם בְּפָרֶךְ.

The Egyptians hoped that the hard work they subjected the Jewish people to would take away their desire for life, and suppress their population growth. When they saw that it didn't work, they moved on to the next step.

The Second Solution - The Midwives

Student's
pg. 4

The king of Egypt spoke to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shifrah and Puah. He said, "When you are delivering the Hebrew women on the delivery stool, if you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.

וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם
 לַמִּיֻּלְדֹת הָעֵבְרִית, אֲשֶׁר
 שֵׁם הָאִחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשֵׁם
 הַשֵּׁנִית פּוּעָה. וַיֹּאמֶר:
 בְּיֻלְדֹכֶן אֶת הָעֵבְרִית
 וּרְאִיתָן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם
 בֵּן הוּא וְהַמְתָּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם
 בַּת הוּא וְחַיָּה.

Rashi:

Shifrah: This is Yocheved. She is called Shifrah because she "improved" (meshaperes) the newborn infant [by setting its limbs].

רש"י

שִׁפְרָה. יוֹכְבֵד, עַל שֵׁם
 שְׁמִשְׁפַּרְתָּ אֶת הַיּוֹלֵד.

Puah: This is Miriam. She is called Puah because she cooed (puah) and talked to the newborn infant in the manner of women who soothe a crying infant.

פועה. זו מרים,
שפועה ומדברת
והוזה לולד, כדרך
הנשים המפיסות
תינוק הבוכה.

Pharaoh calls the midwives, and orders them to kill all the males at birth. He focuses specifically on the males because his astrologers told him that the leader who will be born and take the Jewish people out of Egypt will be a male. But the plan is even more malicious than just eliminating the future redeemer: By doing so he also reduces the birth rate by about fifty percent.

The Midwives Do Not Obey

Student's
pg. 4

The midwives, however, feared G-d and they did not do what the king of Egypt had told them, and they kept the boys alive. The king of Egypt summoned the midwives and said to them, "Why have you done this thing, allowing the boys to live?" The midwives said to Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They have the skills of midwives, and before the midwife has even arrived they have already given birth." G-d was good to the midwives, and the people multiplied and became very strong. It was because the midwives feared G-d, that He made houses for them.

Student's
pg. 5

Rashi:

They have the skills of midwives

[Chayos]: This means that they are as skillful as midwives. Our Rabbis, however, interpreted it to mean that they are compared to the beasts of the

ותיראן המילדת את
האלקים ולא עשו כאשר
דבר אליהו מלך מצרים,
ותחיינן את הילדים. ויקרא
מלך מצרים למילדת,
ויאמר להו: מדוע
עשיתו הדבר הזה ותחיינן
את הילדים. ותאמר
המילדת אל פרעה: כי לא
כנשים המצרית העברית
כי חיות הנה בטורם תבוא
אלהן המילדת וילדו.
וייטב אלקים למילדת
וירב העם ויעצמו מאד.
ויהי כי יראו המילדת
את האלקים ויעש להם
בתים.

רש"י

כי חיות הנה. בקיאות
כמילדות. ורבותינו
דרשו הרי הן משולות
כחיות השדה,

field, which do not require midwives. Where are they compared to beasts? “A lion cub” (Gen. 49:9), “a wolf who devours” (Gen. 49:27), “the firstborn of his ox” (Deut. 33:17), “a swift gazelle” (Gen. 49:21). And whoever was not compared to a beast as above, was included by Scriptures in the expression “and he blessed them” (Gen. 49:18). Scripture states further: “What is your mother? A lioness. . .” (Ezek. 19:2).

He made houses for them: The houses of the priesthood, the Levite family, and the royal family. These are called houses, as is in the verse: And he built the house of the L-rd and the house of the king (I Kings 9:1). The priests and the Levite family came from Yocheved, and the royal family came from Miriam, as is stated in Tractate Sotah.

שְׂאִינָן צְרִיכוֹת מִיְלָדוֹת.
וְהֵיכָן מְשׁוֹלוֹת לְחַיּוֹת?
גּוֹר אֲרִיָּה, זֶאֵב יִטְרֶף
(בראשית מ"ט), בְּכוֹר
שׁוֹרוֹ (דברים ל"ג), אֵילָה
שְׁלֶחָה (בראשית מ"ט),
וּמִי שֶׁלֹּא נִכְתַּב בּוֹ, הֵרִי
הַפְתּוֹב כְּלָלוֹ וַיְבָרַךְ
אוֹתָם (שם), וְעוֹד כְּתִיב
מָה אִמְךָ לְבִיא (יחזקאל
י"ט).

וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם בָּתִּים. בָּתֵּי
כְּהֻנָּה וְלוֹיָהּ וּמַלְכוּת
שְׁקָרוּיִין בָּתִּים, כְּמוֹ
שֶׁכְּתוּב: "לְבָנוֹת אֶת
בֵּית ה' וְאֶת בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ"
(מלכים א' ט', א'), כְּהֻנָּה
וְלוֹיָהּ מִיּוֹכָבֵד, וּמַלְכוּת
מִמֶּרִים. כְּדֹאִיתָא
בְּמִסְכַּת סוּטָה :

The midwives refuse to perform this egregious act. When Pharaoh summons them and asks, “Why do you not obey?” They answer: “Jewish women do not need midwives. They give birth alone, so we never have the opportunity to kill the boys.”

As a reward for this, G-d gives them “houses”: the priestly, Levite, and royal dynasties.

>> The Rebbe

Why Not Shifrah And Puah?

Student's
pg. 6

At the beginning of the Torah portion we read about the Hebrew midwives, named Shifrah and Puah. Pharaoh instructed them “When you are delivering the Hebrew women on the delivery stool, if

בתחילת הפרשה! מסופר אודות ה"מילדות העבריות אשר שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה", שפרעה מלך מצרים ציווה עליהן "וראיתן על האבנים אם בן הוא

you see that the baby is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live. Nevertheless, the Torah tells us that “the midwives, however, feared G-d . . . and they let the boys live.” In reward for the midwives’ conduct, the verse states that “G-d made houses for them.”

This entire story appears simple and straightforward. Yet, Rashi sees it necessary to comment regarding the Hebrew midwives and tell us that Shifra and Puah weren’t their actual names. Rashi writes that Shifrah is actually Yocheved, and she is called Shifrah because she would “improve” - meshaper - the newborns by cleaning them and straightening out their limbs. Puah is actually Miriam, Rashi continues, and was called Puah because she would “coo” - puah - to the babies and soothe them when they cried.

What compelled Rashi to depart from the literal meaning of the verse that the midwives were named Shifrah and Puah and explain that these are only descriptive titles, while their actual names were Yocheved and Miriam?

The question is simple: What caused Rashi to explain the verses in a non-literal manner? Why couldn’t he accept that the names of the midwives were really Shifrah and Puah?

Why Not Large Families?

Student’s
pg. 7

A similar question can be asked on the next Rashi. Rashi explains that “G-d made houses for them” refers to the “houses of the priesthood, Levites, and royalty” that later arose from their descendants. But what compels Rashi to interpret this way? It would appear more straightforward to

והמיתן אותו, ואף על פי כן, “ותראין המילדות את האלקים . . ותחיין את הילדים”, ובשכר זה - “ויעש להם בתים”.

ולכאורה, כל המשך הענין מובן בפשטות, ואין צורך בהסבר וביאור מיוחד. ואף על פי כן, בקשר ל”מילדות העבריות” מוצא רש”י לנכון לפרש פירוש שהוא היפך פשטות הכתוב - “שפרה זו יוכבד”, כלומר, אף על פי שנאמר בכתוב “שפרה”, אין זו שפרה, כי אם “יוכבד”, ומה שנקראת בכתוב בשם “שפרה”, הרי זה “על שם שמשפרת את הולד”, וכן מה שנאמר “ושם השנית פועה” - אין זו פועה, אלא “זו מרים”, ומה שנקראת בכתוב בשם “פועה”, הרי זה “על שם שפועה ומדברת והוגה לְנֶלֶד כדרך הנשים המפייסות תינוק הבוכה”.

ואינו מובן: מהו הכרחו של רש”י לשנות מפשטות הכתוב “שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה”, ולפרש שהכוונה ליוכבד ומרים, אלא שנקראו “שפרה” ו”פועה”, על שם פעולתן!?

שאלה דומה נשאלת על פירוש רש”י בפסוק הבא: “ויעש להם בתים - בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות”. מהו הכרחו של רש”י לפרש בפשוטו של מקרא ש”בתים” מתייחס ל”בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות”? הרי מוטב לפרש “בתים” כפשוטו, כלומר, שהקימו

explain “houses” as “families,” as in the verse “each man and his house,” which means family. The reward would be that instead of being punished by Pharaoh, they merited to establish Jewish families.

משפחות, על דרך מה שכתוב² “איש וביתו”, והשכר שבזה - שבמקום שיקבלו עונש מפרעה, זכו להעמיד משפחות בישראל.

Source 2 Exodus 1:1

Student's
pg. 7

These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt; with Jacob, each man and his household came:

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם אֶת יַעֲקֹב
אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ:

Ibn Ezra, ad loc.

אבן עזרא

Each man and his household.
His descendants.

אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ.
יֹצֵא תְלָצְיוֹ.

When talking about the Israelites going down to Egypt, the Torah writes (lit.) “a man and his house.” It is clear to everyone that “his house” means his family, as Ibn Ezra succinctly explains.

Seemingly, here too the verse is simple and straightforward: as a reward for the midwives’ dedication, G-d built them “houses” - He rewarded them with large families. Why should Rashi interpret the word “houses” not as it is simply understood, but rather as priestly, Levite and royal dynasties?

B. Why Were Midwives Needed?

Rashi always tries to explain the Torah in the simplest manner. When he uses a Midrashic interpretation, it is always because there is a difficulty in understanding the verses in the simple way, and by explaining the verse according to the Midrash this difficulty is resolved.

Below, the Rebbe explains the difficulties in the simple understanding of the verse that led Rashi to use the interpretation of the Midrash.

>> The Rebbe

How Were Two Midwives Enough?

Student's The answer is as follows:
pg. 8

When the five-year-old student reads the verse "The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shifrah and Puah," a simple question comes to his mind.

In the previous verses we read that "The children of Israel were fruitful and swarmed and increased and became very very strong." Rashi explains there that the women would give birth to sextuplets. If so, how could there be only two Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Puah?

How could only two midwives handle the enormous number of births of the Jewish people who were "fruitful and swarmed"?

This is all the more difficult to comprehend considering that they would give birth to sextuplets. One midwife wouldn't be enough to handle such a birth, and at the very least two midwives would have been needed for each birth.

והביאור: כאשר הבן חמש למקרא מגיע לפסוק "ויאמר מלך מצרים למילדות העבריות אשר שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה" - מתעוררת אצלו [קלאץ] קושיה:

בפסוקים שלפני זה נאמר "ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד מאד"³, וכפי שמפרש רש"י "שהיו יולדות שישה בכרס אחד". ואם כן, כיצד ייתכן ש"מילדות העבריות" לא היו אלא שתיים בלבד, "שם האחת שפרה ושם השנית פועה"!?

כיצד יכולות שתי מילדות בלבד להשתלט על ריבוי מופלג של לידות - "פרו וישרצו גו' במאד מאד"!?

ומה גם שמכיון ש"היו יולדות שישה בכרס אחד" - לא יכלו להסתפק במיילדת אחת לכל יולדת (כבלידה רגילה), אלא אפילו בלידה אחת הוצרכו לשתי מיילדות לכל הפחות!

Who Needs Midwives?

Student's When the beginner student continues and studies the following verse he has a question in the other direction.
pg. 8

Student's Pharaoh called for the Hebrew midwives and rebuked them for not implementing his decree: "Why have you done this? Why have you allowed the boys to live?" The midwives answered him: "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women. They have the skills of midwives (alternatively: they are like animals that don't need a midwife), and before the midwife has even arrived they have already given birth." This raises a different question: If the Hebrew women have the skills of midwives—or, alternatively, they don't need a midwife at all—and they give birth before the midwife even arrives, why then was there a need for any Hebrew midwives at all?

The midwives' response must certainly have been factually accurate, because Pharaoh could have investigated the matter. We see the Egyptians' investigative abilities later in connection with Yocheved's own pregnancy, when the Egyptians counted nine months and came to check if she had given birth. As a rule, people don't lie about a matter that can be checked.

These simple questions demonstrate one thing to us: these were no ordinary midwives. On the one hand, two midwives cannot handle millions of births. On the other hand, the midwives themselves told Pharaoh that the Israelite women manage on their own without a midwife. This was certainly not a lie, because Pharaoh had the ability to verify it. If so, what really was the role of these mysterious midwives?

This is why Rashi brings the Midrashic commentary that explains the reality in Egypt.

וכאשר ממשיך הילד ללמוד את הפסוקים הבאים - מתעוררת אצלו שאלה לאיך גיסא:

כאשר פרעה מלך מצרים קרא למיילדות העבריות והוכיח אותן על שלא קיימו את גזירתו, "מדוע עשיתן הדבר הזה ותחיינ את הילדים" - השיבו המיילדות העבריות: "כי לא כנשים המצריות העבריות כי חיות הנה" ("בקיאות כמיילדות", או "משולות לחיות השדה שאינן צריכות מיילדות") "בטרם תבוא אליהן המיילדת וילדו". ואם כן, נשאלת השאלה לאיך גיסא: מכיון ש"חיות הנה", "בקיאות כמיילדות", או "משולות לחיות השדה שאינן צריכות מיילדות", ובמילא, "בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת וילדו" - לשם מה היה צורך בכלל ב"מיילדות העבריות"?

(ובהכרח לומר שדבריהן היו אמת - שהרי פרעה היה יכול לבדוק ולהיווכח אם דבריהן אמת כשם שידעו המצריים מתי צריכה יוכבד ללדת - "שָׁמְנוּ לַהּ המצרים מיום שהחזירה, והיא ילדתו לשישה חדשים ויום אחד . . והם בדקו אחריה לסוף תשעה", ובמילתא דעבידי לגלויי לא משקרי אינשי! [=בדבר שלאחר מכן יתברר לאמיתו - אנשים אינם משקרים.]

C. Spiritual Leaders

>> The Rebbe

Reassuring The People

Student's
pg. 10

A simple answer can be given:

There was no practical need for Hebrew midwives, as the Jewish women would give birth without them. Nevertheless, they served the role of calming and reassuring the Jewish women, with the knowledge that if the need arises for a midwife there are Hebrew midwives available.

והביאור בזה - בפשטות:

בנוגע לפועל - לא היה אמנם צורך ב"מילדות העבריות", שכן, "בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת וילדו": ומה שהיו "מילדות העבריות" - הרי זה רק כדי להרגיע את רוחן של נשי ישראל, שאפילו אם יהיה מקרה שבו יצטרכו למיילדת, ידעו שישנן "מילדות העבריות".

The Jewish women did indeed give birth on their own. The midwives played the role of reassurance, that if there would be any complications in birth they would be available to help.

Extraordinarily Righteous Women

Student's
pg. 10

However, considering that there was an inordinate amount of births, and extraordinary births of sextuplets, two midwives shouldn't have sufficed to reassure the Jewish women.

It must be that the Hebrew midwives weren't just regular women, but extraordinarily righteous. Then, knowing that they had such exceptional midwives, the Jewish women could be reassured.

אמנם, מכיון שמדובר אודות ריבוי מופלג של לידות, ומה גם שכל לידה אינה על דרך הרגיל, כי אם, "שישה בכרס אחד" - הרי גם כדי להרגיע את רוחן של נשי ישראל לא מספיק שתי מיילדות בלבד!

ולכן, בהכרח לומר שהמיילדות העבריות לא היו נשים על דרך הרגיל, כי אם, נשים צדקניות באופן מיוחד, שכן, כאשר נשי ישראל ידעו שישנן מיילדות מיוחדות כאלו, די היה בשתי מיילדות כדי להרגיע את רוחן.

Even just in the role of moral support, two midwives shouldn't suffice for an entire nation. It must be that these midwives were renowned as exceptionally righteous women, and their very existence reassured the Jewish women as they pursued their special role of bringing more Jewish life into the world.

Who Were They?

Student's
pg. 10

Thus, a straightforward reading of the verses bears out that the Hebrew midwives were exceptionally righteous people. But we still don't know who they were.

It can't be that the midwives were actually women named Shifrah and Puah, because we don't know of any righteous women by those names.

Therefore, Rashi relies on the tradition transmitted in the Midrash that the midwives were Yocheved and Miriam, who were called Shifrah and Puah as a description of their actions. Rashi does this because it is untenable to explain that these were regular women named Shifrah and Puah, as the midwives must have been exceptionally righteous women.

The Israelite women at that time did not need midwives. They managed on their own. They just needed moral support - someone they could count on in case the birth got complicated. In many cases, this moral support is not necessarily from a professional doctor or an experienced midwife - but from a spiritual leader who gives encouragement and assurance that everything will be fine.

Yocheved and Miriam had both. They were expert midwives and also exceedingly righteous and renowned among the Jewish people. Thanks to their experience and expertise, and especially their spiritual power and influence among the Jewish women, they gave these women the confidence and encouragement that everything would be fine, and encouraged them to continue having children.

Now it is all clear:

1. Since it was a spiritual power, two women were able to give encouragement to an entire nation.
2. Pharaoh ordered them to kill the children because he thought that they were ordinary midwives who help with the birth process. They had to explain to him that it doesn't work that way. The Israelite women give birth alone, and their role is only encouragement and moral support. This wasn't a lie, it was the reality.

והנה, פשוטו של מקרא מכריח רק ש"מילדות העבריות" היו נשים מיוחדות בצדקתן, אבל עדיין אין אנו יודעים מי היו אותן נשים מיוחדות;

ואין לומר שהכוונה לנשים שנקראו בשם שפרה ופועה - שהרי לא מצינו שהיו נשים צדקניות במיוחד שנקראו בשם "שפרה" ו"פועה".

ובעניין זה מסתמך רש"י על הקבלה שהובאה במדרשי חז"ל שנשים אלו הם יוכבד ומרים (אלא שנקראו שפרה ופועה על שם פעולתן כו') - מכיון שבלי זה אי־אפשר לפרש שהכוונה לסתם נשים שנקראו בשם שפרה ופועה, שהרי בהכרח שיהיו נשים מיוחדות בצדקתן כו'.

D. Measure for Measure

But we are still left with one question: Why does Rashi interpret the word “houses” not in its simple meaning as “families,” but rather as the priestly, Levite and royal dynasties?

>> The Rebbe

The Greatest Reward

Student's
pg. 12

In conclusion, Rashi explains that the reward the Hebrew midwives received was “houses of the priesthood, Levites, and royalty.”

Rashi can't explain that “G-d made houses for them” means simply that they established families. This wouldn't be an appropriate reward for the actions of the midwives in saving the male babies. Raising a family was a natural part of life for all Jews, and at that time it was even natural to give birth to sextuplets.

It can't be suggested that raising a family was a special reward for the midwives because it was expected that Pharaoh would punish them and deny them this possibility. As explained, Pharaoh had accepted the explanation given by the midwives that the Hebrew women are unique and give birth without assistance, so there was no reason for him to punish them.

Rashi is therefore compelled to explain that the reward of “G-d made houses for them” refers to “houses of the priesthood, Levites, and royalty.” Rashi brings support for this interpretation from another verse in the

ובסיום הענין, בנוגע לשכרן של המיילדות העבריות, “ויעש להם בתים” - מפרש רש”י “בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות”:

רש”י אינו יכול לפרש ש”ויעש להם בתים” פירושו שהקימו משפחות - שכן, דבר זה אין בו משום שכר על פעולתן של ה”מיילדות העבריות” (”ותחיין את הילדים”), שהרי כן היה הסדר הרגיל אצל כל בני ישראל, ועד כדי כך, ש”היו יולדות שישה בכרס אחד” על פי טבע!

ואין לומר שביחס ל”מיילדות העבריות” עצם הענין של הקמת משפחות הוא ענין של שכר, מכיון שעל פי טבע היה צריך פרעה להעניש אותן - שהרי נתבאר לעיל שפרעה קיבל את המענה של המיילדות העבריות, “כי לא כנשים המצריות העבריות . . . בטרם תבוא אליהן המילדת וילדו”, ובמילא, לא היה מקום להעניש אותן!

Torah where a dynasty is referred to as a house, “Solomon built the two houses, the Temple of the Lord and the King’s house.” Rashi then specifies that “the priestly and Levite families descended from Yocheved, and the royal family descended from Miriam, as explained in Tractate Sotah.”

ולכן, מוכרח רש"י לפרש שהשכר של "ויעש להם בתים" הוא - "בתי כהונה ולוי' ומלכות, שקרויין בתים", ומביא ראיה מהתנ"ך שמצינו שקרויין בתים - "הבתים את בית ה' ואת בית המלך", ומפרט - "כהונה ולויה מיוכבד, ומלכות ממרים, כדאיתא במסכת סוטה".

In a reality in which every woman was giving birth to sextuplets, having a large family wasn't a special reward. So what was the reward G-d gave the midwives?

It can't be argued that the reward was the very fact that Pharaoh didn't punish them, because they had offered a valid excuse, that they weren't actually present at the births! Rashi therefore must employ the Midrash's explanation that the reward was unique: priestly, Levite, and royal dynasties.

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Reward That Corresponds To The Good Deed

In another talk, the Rebbe offers another in-depth explanation, as to why Rashi explains that the reward they received was the special dynasties - it was measure for measure.

Measure for measure is a moral, social and legal principle that is considered fundamental in the Torah. The essence of this principle is that G-d rewards people and behaves towards them in the same manner in which they behave and act. Human courts should also judge and punish those brought before them in a manner directly correlating with their actions, just as they behaved towards others.

Below are some examples:

1. The sin of the tree of knowledge: *The snake was the most cunning of all the beasts of the field, and used its cunningness to make Adam sin. It was therefore punished by becoming the most cursed of all the beasts of the field, and his means of movement were removed from him. He wanted to get close to the woman and talk to her, so G-d keeps him away from her and creates an enmity between him and the woman, and also between their descendants. (Genesis 3:1-2)*

2. Cain and Abel: *The punishment of Cain, a farmer exiled from his home to become a wanderer, is explained by the words of the verses "Now, you are cursed even more than the ground, which opened its mouth to take your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will not continue to*

give its strength to you; you will be a wanderer over the earth” (Genesis 4:11-12). In the same way that the ground received the blood of his brother who was murdered, and “suppressed” and covered up the murder, so too will the ground not give him its crops. Therefore, immediately after the flood, a clear rule was established in the Torah in reference to murder: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, through man shall his blood be shed, for in the image of G-d He made man” (Genesis 9:6). Measure for measure, the blood of the one who sheds man’s blood, will himself be shed.

3. The death of the firstborn: The Torah explains that the death of the firstborn in Egypt, due to the cruelty and abuse the Jewish people suffered at the hands of the Egyptians, was measure for measure: “You shall say to Pharaoh, ‘This is what G-d said, ‘My firstborn son is Israel.’ Therefore, I say to you, ‘Send out My son so that he will worship Me, but if you refuse to send him out, I am going to slay your firstborn son’” (Exodus 4:22-23).

In the Talmud we learn that it also works on the positive side:

Source 3 Tractate Sotah 9b

Student's
pg. 13

The same is so with regard to good deeds:

Miriam waited for Moses for one hour as it is stated: “And his sister stood at a distance.” Therefore the Jewish people delayed themselves in the desert for seven days for her, as it is stated: “and the people did not journey until Miriam was brought back in.”

Joseph merited to bury his father, and there was none among his brothers greater than he, as it is stated: “And Joseph went up to bury his father, and there went up with him both chariots and horsemen.” In turn, no one had a greater burial than Joseph, as Moses himself was personally involved in transporting his coffin.

Moses merited to be involved in the transportation of Joseph’s bones, and

וְכֹן לְעֵינֵי הַטּוֹבָה:

מְרִיָּם הִמְתִּינָה לְמוֹשֶׁה
שָׁעָה אַחַת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
וַתִּתְצַב אַחֲתָו מִרְחוֹק,
לְפִיכֶן נִתְעַכְּבוּ לָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל
שִׁבְעָה יָמִים בְּמִדְבָּר,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְהָעָם לֹא נָסַע עַד
הָאֶסְף מְרִיָּם.

יוֹסֵף זָכָה לְקַבֵּר אֶת אָבִיו,
וְאֵין בְּאֶחָיו גְּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לְקַבֵּר
אֶת אָבִיו וַיַּעֲלוּ עִמּוֹ גַּם
רֶכֶב גַּם פָּרָשִׁים, מִי לָנוּ
גְּדוֹל מִיוֹסֵף שְׁלֹא נִתְעַסֵּק
בּוֹ אֱלֹא מוֹשֶׁה.

מוֹשֶׁה זָכָה בְּעֲצֻמוֹת יוֹסֵף,
וְאֵין בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל גְּדוֹל מִמֶּנּוּ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וַיִּקַּח מוֹשֶׁה אֶת
עֲצֻמוֹת יוֹסֵף עִמּוֹ. מִי

there was none among the Jewish people greater than he, as it is stated: “And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him.” No one had a greater burial than Moses, as G-d Himself performed his burial, as it is stated: “And He buried him in the valley.”

Not only concerning Moses did the Sages say this, but also concerning all the righteous individuals, as it is stated: “Your righteousness shall go before you and the glory of the L-rd shall gather you in.”

Following this part, the Talmud says (Ibid 11b) concerning the midwives:

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“It was because the midwives feared G-d, that He made them houses” (Exodus 1:21). Rav and Shmuel disagree: One says that G-d made the houses of the priesthood and the Levites descend from the midwives, and one says that G-d made the houses of royalty descend from them.

גְּדוֹל מִמּוֹשֶׁה שְׁלֹא נִתְעַסַּק
בוֹ אֱלֹהֵי הַמָּקוֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר
וַיִּקְבֹּר אוֹתוֹ בְּגִי.

לֹא עַל מוֹשֶׁה בְּלִבְד אָמְרוּ
אֱלֹהֵי עַל כָּל הַצְּדִיקִים
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר וְהִלַּךְ לְפָנֶיךָ
צְדִקְךָ, כְּבוֹד ה' יֵאסְפֶנְךָ.

וַיְהִי כִי יִרְאוּ הַמִּיֻּלְדוֹת
אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים וַיַּעַשׂ לָהֶם
בָּתִּים, רַב וְשְׂמוּאֵל, חַד
אָמַר בָּתֵּי כְּהוֹנֵה וּלְוִיָּה,
וְחַד אָמַר בָּתֵּי מַלְכוּת.

Source 4

Likutei Sichot, vol. 21, pp. 6-7 (Hebrew edition)

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pg. 14

To underscore the advantage of this explanation Rashi references Tractate Sotah. The relevant Talmudic source there directly follows a discussion of the Mishnah's teaching “people are measured with the same measure that they use.” The Talmudic discussion includes examples of rewards and punishments that correlated with every

וכדי להדגיש את היתרון
והמעלה של פירוש
זה, מציין רש"י ואומר
”כדאיתא במסכת
סוטה”... ששם מופיע
ענין זה בהמשך לדברי
המשנה⁸ ולסוגיית הגמרא
”במדה שאדם מודד בה
מודדין לו”, והענינים

detail of the person's conduct.

This highlights the advantage of the interpretation that "houses" refers to the priestly, Levite, and royal dynasties. This interpretation doesn't only express the greatness of the reward, it also shows how the reward was measure for measure, corresponding to the actions of the midwives in every detail.

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pg. 15

By allowing the male babies to live, the midwives didn't only help establish Jewish families, they helped build most—if not all—of the generation of the Exodus, the ancestors of the Jewish people of all subsequent generations.

The midwives therefore received a reward that was precisely measure for measure. Not only did they personally raise families, or bear children who were priests, Levites, and kings, they merited to establish "houses of priesthood, Levites, and royalty." These special dynasties exist within the Jewish people for all time.

מדה כנגד מדה המוזכרים במשנה ובגמרא כוללים גם עניני שכר ועונש שהם כנגד ובאותה "מדה" של כל פרט במעשה האדם.

ועל-ידי כך מובן היתרון של הפירוש "בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות": כאן אין מודגש גודל השכר בלבד, אלא בעיקר מודגשת העובדה שהשכר ניתן מדה כנגד מדה בכל הפרטים - כנגד פרטי מעשיהן של המיילדות:

בפעולתן "ותחינה את הילדים" סייעו המיילדות לא רק בהקמת משפחות יהודיות, אלא על-ידי כך הוקם רוב, או כל דור יוצאי מצרים, שממנו יצא עם ישראל כולו עד סוף כל הדורות.

ולפיכך, ניתן להן שכר באופן של מדה כנגד מדה במפורט - לא זו בלבד שלהן היו בנים ומשפחות⁹, או שלהן היו ילדים כהנים לויים ומלכים, אלא שמהן הוקמו "בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות", הבתים המיוחדים, "יתר שאת ויתר עז" שבשארל, עד סוף¹⁰ כל הדורות¹¹.

8) ולא כבגמ' "כהונה ולויה אהרן ומשה ומ"ד בתי מלכות דוד נמי ממרים קאתי". כי עיקר התוכן והדגשה בהשטר הוא לא לזה שהי' להם בנים במעלות מיוחדות כו', כ"א שמהם יצא ענין הכהונה כו' - "בתי כהונה ולויה ומלכות".

8) ה, ב ואילך. ושם ט, ב במשנה "וכן לענין הטובה מרים המתינה כו'".
9) כנראה"ע הנ"ל בפ"י הקצר.
10) ועפ"ז מובנת השייכות ל"בתים" - ראה גו"א כאן בפרש"י.
11) וי"ל שלכן משנה רש"י וכתב "כהונה ולויה מיוכבד ומלכות ממרים",