

SHEMOT

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Moshe had a terrible speech impediment and he needed his very own translator for people to understand him. But this challenge never deterred Moshe from accepting his task to lead the Jewish people. Moshe's lesson to us is that we all have the ability to overcome any challenges, and no task is too hard to overcome. What do you think it takes to overcome the challenges that face us?

PRIDE

One of the ways that the Jewish people survived for generations as slaves in Egypt was by remaining committed to who they were. Even though they suffered terribly, they never let go of their identity. They never changed their (Jewish) names for Egyptian ones or tried to assimilate into the Egyptian culture, although it would have made their lives easier. We should be proud of who we are, even when it seems tough. How do you express your Jewish pride?

CONFRONTATION

Moshe and Aaron approach Pharaoh and request freedom for the Jewish people. This is the initial conflict between Pharaoh and the Jews. Pharaoh clearly did not take it well, and ultimately said no. Confrontation is not an easy task- it is difficult to deal with. How do you deal with conflict and confrontation? How can you remain calm during this process?

VAERA

DOING WHAT WE ARE TOLD

God commands Moshe to approach Pharaoh and ask him to free the Jewish people from slavery. Before Moshe sets out, God warns him that Pharaoh will refuse the request. There are times when someone makes a request of you that seems to make no sense. The lesson from Moshe is that when someone makes a request from you, it is important to fulfill the mission even if you don't necessarily understand it at the time.

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BO

NEW BEGINNINGS

The first mitzvah ever commanded to the Jewish people was Rosh Chodesh. This celebration is not merely to welcome a new month, but an opportunity to grow and mature. No matter what transpired in the previous stage of your life, you always have the opportunity to grow and right any wrongs. Each month brings a new chance. We celebrate the opportunity to be constantly growing and maturing.

ULTIMATE HONESTY

Moshe warned Pharaoh of the tenth and final plague—the death of every firstborn. When declaring the start of the plague, Moshe said that it will begin at approximately midnight, but God had informed Moshe that the plague would begin at exactly midnight. Moshe was purposely vague so that the Egyptians wouldn't miscalculate the time. Honesty is so important and necessary that Moshe made sure the Egyptians should not even mistakenly think that he was untrue to his word.

UNWAVERING FAITH

The Jewish people were able to survive their slavery in Egypt. What kept the Jewish people intact was their unwavering faith that their situation was going to improve. They could have easily given up hope, and simply disappeared from existence. But they remained faithful that God would improve their situation, and He did. In everyday life, we are faced with certain challenges that can cause us to lose hope. We should always believe that the situation will improve—and truthfully, it always does with perseverance!

BESHALACH

EXPRESSING THANKS

The splitting of the Red Sea takes place. After the sea split, the Jewish people sing a song of appreciation. It is extremely important to express gratitude to someone (or God) publicly. What are some things that you are thankful for?

SHABBAT

This parsha introduces the concept of the Shabbat, the weekly day of rest. During the week a person is constantly distracted and busy, and they rarely have time to study Torah and explore their faith. God therefore commanded a weekly day of rest to give us the opportunity to take a break from our weekly diversions. Without the distractions of work, school, iPhones, iPads, etc., there is ample time for Torah study, attending synagogue and spending quality time with family. What are some major distractions that you experience during the week?

CLOSURE

The Jewish people are leaving slavery in Egypt. They are now joyous and free, however; it is always a good thing to reflect back on experiences. They sang their song of thanks. This could be their reflection. We go through a lot of different experiences in life and there are specific ways for us to look back and glean on them. Was it what you thought it would be? Do you feel satisfied? How can you make your next experience even better?

YITRO

LAYING A FOUNDATION

The Jewish people are given the famous Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments serve as a foundation for Judaism. A person cannot live his life without a foundation, or guidelines. This is the purpose of the Ten Commandments and the reason they are so monumental. If we set standards to live by, we are more likely to have a productive and fulfilling life.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE

Not only did Yitro leave the comfort of his home and his position of leadership; he also acknowledged that it is okay to change your lifestyle if you realize that something else is more legitimate. This powerful lesson applies to everyone. It is never too late to change your actions if you realize that there is a more proper way to act. Have you been in a situation where you realized a more appropriate lifestyle and adapted to it?

A JEWISH NATION

When the Jewish people received the Torah and the Ten Commandments, they were so unified that they were considered to be like one person. The world needed to be purified before the Torah could be given, and that was possible only if the Jews worked towards purifying the world as one group with one goal. Whenever a group of people set out to accomplish something, they must do it with complete unity.

MISHPATIM

HUMANKIND

In this parsha we learn about the laws regarding damaging someone else's property, even if it was by accident. It is important to protect a borrowed item even more than you would protect your own belongings. It is not enough to simply regard these things like you regard your own stuff, but it is necessary to value the property of others with the utmost care.

ACCEPTANCE

This parsha talks about the requirement to be kind to a convert or foreigner. All people deserve to be treated nicely, and slight superficial differences are no reason to look down upon someone. Make sure to go out of your way to make new people feel as comfortable and included as possible. Always treat others with the same respect you like to be treated with, no matter where they come from or what they look like. What are some ways that you can ensure that you will always be kind and accepting of a person who is new to your life?

JUSTICE SYSTEM

This parsha gives the laws of our justice system. There is an importance to civil law in the Torah. The Torah teaches that moral conduct is integral to religious life. Who creates the values in your life? Do you have the same values as others? Does everyone doing the same thing make it right?

TERUMAH

CONTRIBUTIONS

This parsha describes the donations that the Jewish people gave towards building the Tabernacle—the portable Temple in the desert. Sometimes, doing the right thing and working to build something beautiful for everyone to use and share can cost us a lot. Just as the Jewish people donated their most expensive and valuable items for a spiritual cause, so too, we can learn to expend our most precious resources on a unifying project that will benefit everyone around us.

JEWISH COMMUNITY

Miraculously, the cherubs on the Ark embraced each other when the Jewish people were united, but turned away from each other when the Jews did not treat each other kindly. The Ark housed the Tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments, and was kept in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred room in the Temple. The fact that the cherubs were in such an important place shows how God treasures Jewish unity—and how we should too!

ITEMS OF SIGNIFICANCE

This parsha describes in detail the items in the Tabernacle. The Torah dives into such detail to show us how significant each item is. We have many items of significance in our lives, whether they have religious value or not. They can have a certain meaning to our families. What are some items of significance to you? Do you have any items that have been preserved in your family for multiple generations?

TETZAVEH

ASKING FOR HELP

This parsha describes the Kohen Gadol's beautiful breastplate that served a deep spiritual purpose. Whenever the high priest was asked a question that he could not answer, or was faced with a situation that he could not resolve, he would pose the question to his breastplate. He was the wisest of all men, but even he wasn't expected to be able to solve every problem he faced, he knew that it was okay to ask for help whenever he didn't have a solution. When a person is faced with a situation that he or she cannot resolve alone, it is important to ask for help or assistance.

STARTING ON THE RIGHT FOOT

This parsha describes the elaborate inauguration ceremony for the priests who served in the Tabernacle (Mishkan). This shows us how important it is to begin each new endeavor with enthusiasm. When you make a big deal out of starting something, you're more likely to stick with it later on, when the going gets tough. When have you begun something with the right attitude, and how has that helped you complete the project?

BEING A LIGHT FOR OTHERS

The menorah was lit every day in the Holy Temple. Unfortunately we do not have a Temple now, but each of us can create a "mini-Temple" within ourselves. Just like the menorah brightened the Temple when it was kindled, we too can brighten the world for all of those around us by making it a more positive and holy place. This is accomplished by being committed to the Torah and living a life of honesty and integrity. Being kind and charitable, helping others whenever we can, and being dedicated to the mitzvahs will light up the world.

KI KISA

SECOND CHANCES

This parsha tells the episode of the Golden Calf. The story teaches us that we have the ability to rectify our mistakes. God could have easily decided to destroy the Jewish nation after they so blatantly disregarded His laws, but He didn't. He allowed them the opportunity to fix the mistake. Everyone makes mistakes, but not everyone learns from them and corrects them. Try to be someone who does. Have you ever done something that you regretted? How have you rectified the situation and learned from it?

GOD'S LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE

God commands Moshe to count the Jewish people. When something is precious to you, there is enjoyment in counting it, even if you already know how many you have. The opportunity to admire the beauty of each Jew brings Him immense pride. God considers all Jews precious no matter what circumstance they are in, but it is our responsibility to be worthy of the title "God's precious ones."

LIVING AND LEARNING

The story of the Golden Calf was quite a mistake. It was a sin; an act that the Jewish people performed that was not seen well in the eyes of God. However, God gave us a second chance. This can teach us that in life, things don't go our way. We make mistakes and we move on. Growing comes from failure. We live and do things that may not be great, but we learn from them and we gain strength from them. What have you learned from the last mistake you made?

VAYAKEL/PEKUDEI

RELAXATION

Shabbat is meant to be a day of complete relaxation, and therefore no work is permitted. Think about this: what do you do when you need to study for a big test? You turn off your cell phone and all your gadgets, and you focus on getting the work done. Shabbat serves the same purpose. It is a day that you turn off all of the distractions, and you focus on Torah and prayer.

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

Moshe had it all. He could talk to God whenever he wanted and he knew the whole Torah and practiced all the mitzvahs. But that wasn't enough for him. He knew it was in his hands to help the Jewish people build their connection to God. He went ahead and built the Tabernacle, so all the Jews would be able to talk to God too. From here we learn that we should never be satisfied with helping ourselves. God wants us to reach out to others and draw them into His tent, into a life of Torah and mitzvahs.

NEEDS VS. WANTS

The parsha lists the materials needed for the Tabernacle. Needs are those things that are absolutely critical to living: Sufficient food and water, a roof over our heads, clothing to protect us from the elements, and a source of income to support ourselves and our families. All the rest is the stuff of want; that red convertible, the new Apple watch, your daily habit of a large iced coffee. We easily lose perspective on the difference between needs and wants. But we must focus on the luxuries that we take for granted in our lives. How can you find a mindfulness which helps us differentiate between needs and wants?