



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Shemot: Be Somebody!

Sometime later, Moses grew up, he went out to his kinsmen and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man, one of his kinsmen. He turned this way and that and saw no man. He struck the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. (Shemot/Ex 2:10-11)

Moses who has grown up in the Egyptian palace has quite a dramatic “coming out” as a Hebrew. Here, he goes out to his kinsmen and witnesses their brutal oppression and lashes out, killing an Egyptian taskmaster.

#### Think about this scene:

- What caused Moses to take such drastic action?
- Was Moses’ violence an instinctive, spontaneous, emotive act?

It would seem that Moses’ act is thoughtful and premeditated; after all, before he strikes the Egyptian, we read: “He turned this way and that **and saw no man.**”

- What is meant by the phrase, “and saw no man”?

Here are some options:

1. **No witnesses:** “He looked this way and that and saw that no one was watching” [Rashi – Peshuto]

In other words, Moses wanted to ensure there were no witnesses other than the Hebrew who had been beaten. Despite his caution, it seems that Hebrew slave spread the word of Moses’ murderous act, such that (v.15) even Pharaoh eventually heard about it.

Why would it be important for us to know that Moses was worried about witnesses?  
What does this tell us about him?

2. **No One to Act:** “No Man: Moses thought that one of the Hebrews might rise up to save his beaten brother” (Haktav Ve’akabbalah). “Moses looked for an Egyptian to protest the unjustified beating, but there was “no one” ... they were all filled with hatred.” (Haamek Davar)

In this reading Moses *is* searching for someone. For a Hebrew Man, for an Egyptian, for anybody who might take action or even merely protest. But nobody will come to the aid of the broken and beaten Hebrew. Moses is met by vacant, helpless stares from the enslaved and depressed Hebrews, and on the other side he meets cruel, heartless determined looks from the Egyptian guards.

3. **No Morality:** “Although the obvious meaning is that he wanted to be sure the violent intervention he intended would go unobserved... there is a pointed echoing of “man” (=ish)—an Egyptian man, a Hebrew man, and no man—that invites one to ponder the role and obligations of a man as one man victimizes another.” (Robert Alter. *Five Books of Moses* pg.314)

Here the word “Man” becomes a metaphor for humanity itself. Moses is not merely looking for practical assistance. He wonders about the nonchalant acceptance of the Egyptian oppressions and wonders what has happened to humanity. Where is “Man”? There is “no man!”

Moses sees that there is no Man, no representative of human morality, on the scene. Man, destined from the moment of creation to be its crowning glory, is not to be found in the bitter reality Moses sees before him.... Moses realizes that human morality... is absent from the setting in which he finds himself. (Moshe Lichtenstein. *Moses: Envoy of God, Envoy of His People* pg.10)

**So please discuss:**

- With which interpretation do you identify?
- What does each interpretation tell us about Moses’ state of mind?
- In Pirkei Avot (2:5) we read: “In a place where there is no man/no one (ein ish), strive to be a man/someone (ish).” What does this statement mean? How is this Mishna based on our story?
- Share an instance in which you have employed the dictum of this Mishna.
- How do you feel you, in your life, can fulfill the words of this Mishna?

Shabbat Shalom!