



## Shemos – Waiting for the Perfect Opportunity

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

The cries of an afflicted nation proved too intense to go unanswered. God tells Moshe that he will be the Divine emissary to emancipate the enslaved Jewish nation and allow them to be a free people in their destined land. Moshe took leave of Yisro and began the journey to Egypt with his wife, Tzipporah and their two children. The Torah then records a strange episode. *“Now he was on the way, in an inn, that the Lord met him and sought to put him to death. So Tzipporah took a sharp stone and severed her son's foreskin and cast it to his feet, and she said, “For you are a bridegroom of blood to me.” So He released him. Then she said, “A bridegroom of blood concerning the circumcision (Shemos 4:24-26).”*

What exactly is occurring in this episode? Just a few verses earlier God insisted that Moshe accept the responsibility of leading the Jewish people and now God stands ready to kill him?

The Talmud (Nedarim 31b) explains that God was upset that Moshe had delayed the *bris* (circumcision) of his newborn son. The Talmudic sage, Rebbi (Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi) explains that had Moshe circumcised the child while still in *Midyan* their journey down to Egypt would have been delayed (a child post-circumcision is in a precarious state of health and cannot travel). Therefore, Moshe decided to begin the journey (as he felt this to be the will of God) and perform the *bris* in closer proximity to Egypt. Why was God upset? *“Mipney she'nisaseyk b'malon techila, because Moshe took care of their lodging arrangements first (before performing the bris).”* Moshe should have first circumcised his son and then only afterwards looked for lodging and accommodations. The Divine wrath was not a result of Moshe's failure to perform the *bris* in *Midyan* (God agreed with Moshe's thought process), it was a result of Moshe's misplaced priorities – it should have been circumcision first, lodging second.

But is this such an egregious error that it should have potentially cost Moshe his life? Moshe was not negating the Mitzvah? He stood ready to comply. Moshe was simply a father, a husband looking to find accommodations for his family. Why such severity in the Divine response? What is the Torah trying to teach us?

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook (Orach Mishpat 143) explains this entire episode in a novel and dramatic fashion. Why *did* Moshe take care of his lodging arrangements first? After all this is Moshe Rabbeinu, a man who spoke with God, a man who understood that the future and success of the Jewish nation depended on adherence to the word of God. Why didn't Moshe immediately take care of the circumcision even prior to looking for an inn? Rav Kook explains Moshe didn't want to simply perform the Mitzvah; he wanted to perform it with *“hiddur, additional beauty.”* The concept of *hiddur mitzvah, beautification of a commandment*, directs us to not simply perform the basic minimum in order to discharge our religious obligations. Rather, we must strive to perform each *mitzvah* with all of its details, beautifying the physical components to indicate how precious and meaningful each spiritual act truly is. Moshe did not want to perform his son's *bris* on the side of the road. Moshe wanted the *bris* of his youngest son to be a beautiful moment of spiritual growth and elation. He wanted to make a celebratory meal, invite guests, and speak about the meaning of this physical bond between man and his Creator. And so, he delayed the *bris* in order to find suitable accommodations – not just to house his family but to provide the appropriate venue for the performance of this important *mitzvah*. But God did not agree with this approach. *“Mitzvah ha'ba l'yadecha al tachmitzena, if an opportunity for a mitzvah arises do not let it tarry (literally become chametz, leaven);”* better to seize an imperfect, present moment than to delay with the expectation of something greater in the unknown future.

This episode carries with it an important message. There are opportunities that cross our life threshold each and every day. Too often we actively allow these opportunities to pass us by because we are “waiting for something better.” We give up present meaning in the hope of some unknown future. It is true, often the opportunities before us are imperfect, tarnished and not what I desired and imagined – but they can be meaningful and fulfilling nevertheless. Let us find the strength to take advantage of the beautiful life opportunities that present themselves before us and not waste a lifetime waiting for something better.