

MORASHAH
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 811 Palisade Ave., Teaneck, NJ 07666
www.utj.org 201.801.0707

Rabbi Ephraim I. Zimand

Parashat HaShavuah Series

The Book of *Shemot* opens by closing out the era of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and beginning the history – and instruction – of the People under the leadership of Moses.

The *parashah* of *Shemot* introduces us to Moses and covers 80 years – the first two-thirds – of his life. The remainder of the Book of *Shemot*, and the other books of the Torah, deal with the rest of his life (40 years): his interaction with God and with the People of Israel, which begins in his 80th year. In itself, this proportion is not unusual for the Torah, since the Torah does not purport to be a book of biography, but a Book of Instruction or Guidance (thus its name **TORAH**).

This being the case, it is certainly legitimate for us to question what the significance might be that, of all the activities Moses engaged in up to the age of 80, the Torah found it important to tell us only these three: Moses's protection of a Hebrew slave being beaten by an Egyptian taskmaster (Ex. 2:11,12), his interference in a scuffle between two Hebrews (Ex. 2:13,14), and his defense of seven Midianite shepherdesses against a group of bullying Midianite shepherds (Ex. 2:16,17).

It would seem legitimate to suggest that the Torah intended us to see in these three incidents a quality, or qualities, that primed him to be the leader of the People of Israel, and the teacher of God's Way.

I would like to suggest that these three actions demonstrate Moses as a champion for justice in three disparate circumstances: between Jew and gentile, between Jew and Jew, and between gentile and gentile. It seems to me that this quality of being concerned for justice regardless of who is the victim or who is the perpetrator is the essential bottom line of Torah and God's Way.

As support for this contention I would like to suggest two sources – one, Torah and the other, Talmudic.

After 46 years in the pulpit rabbinate, Rabbi Zimand retired to Jerusalem.

The Union for Traditional Judaism is a trans-denominational organization dedicated to bringing the message of open-minded Halakhic Judaism to the widest possible audience.

All *Divrei Torah* can be found at <http://www.utj.org/Torah/HaShavuah>

Torah (Genesis 18:18, 19): "Abraham is to become a great and populous nation, with all the nations of the earth blessing themselves through him. For I have singled him out to charge his children and his posterity to preserve the **WAY OF GOD, ACTING WITH JUSTICE AND EQUITY**, so that God may bring upon Abraham what was promised him."

Talmud (Shabbat 31a): Hillel's summation of the entire Torah in 25 words or less (i.e., "while standing on one foot") - "**WHAT IS HATEFUL TO YOU, DO NOT DO TO YOUR COMPANION. THIS IS ALL OF TORAH**, the rest is commentary. Now go and study."

Before everything else - but not in place of anything else - every person who is committed to God, Torah, and *mitzvot* must be a champion for justice wherever injustice is found. That would seem to be a significance of Moses's actions before his call by God.

Shabbat Shalom!

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