**Shmot Drasha**

R. Daniel Lev 1/6/2018

1. Since today we are entering the Holy book of Shemot I think its about time that we talk about Jesus…..Ok, we can throw in Buddha as well.
2. One thing that these two spiritual beings had in common was the moment of their enlightenment, when they fully realized and connected to the prophetic message that they were to bring into the world. That which was beyond reality. JC (at least according to Matthew 4:1-11), attained this after he went through a mikva with Yonatan the Mikva Man, also known as Johnny the Baptist. Soon after His bath, Yoshki was enlightened about his truth that he was a child of G-d.
3. On the other hand, Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, - who, by the way, was one of the few Indians not from Bollywood or customer service – Buddha didn’t get wet before he received his enlightening message - instead, he sat down under a nice tree and focused his mind on being where he was, freeing himself from mental distractions.
4. It wasn’t so easy as that, though. Each of them reached the height of their spiritual enlightenment only after going through some internal tests by struggling with their inside forces of evil and opposition. For Yoshki, the Jewish guy, he was whisked off by the Sah-tan, the devil, and presented with all kind of temptations. After spurning the Sah-tan, he eventually told him to “Geyt Avek!!” – go away, get out of my face.
5. Similarly, Buddha was tempted and challenged by the demon Mara who sent his sexy daughters to get the Indian to leave the Bodhi Tree and do nasty things. When that didn’t work, he sent an army against him and Buddha simply used his internal contemplative self to drown them out. By morning he had connected to his spiritual truth. What JC and Buddha had in common was that their path to spiritual enlightenment occurred within both their contemplative focus and spiritual struggles – again, all occurring inside of themselves and transcending the physical world.
6. So nu, enough of Holy goyim – what about Moshe? What did Moses do to connect to the Source of the Universe? After all – this week’s parsha is Shmot, which contains the stories of Moshe’s early life up to the doorstep of the Exodus. I think that in this week’s parsha we’ll focus on Moshe’s first major encounter with his spiritual destiny. I believe it can give us guidance as to how each of us can come in contact with our life changing messages, those that connect us to the Source of the Universe and can direct us to where we need to go in life.
7. And we can find this in the first five sentences in the Third Chapter of the book of Shemot:
8. MOSHE WAS TENDING THE SHEEP OF YITRO, HIS FATHER-IN-LAW, THE PRIEST OF MIDIAN. HE LED THE SHEEP ALONG THE WILDERNESS AND CAME TO THE MOUNTAIN OF G-D, TOWARDS *CHOREV*.
9. AN ANGEL OF G-D APPEARED TO HIM IN THE HEART OF THE FIRE THAT WAS IN THE MIDST OF A BUSH. AND HE SAW THAT BEHOLD: THE BUSH WAS BURNING IN THE FIRE BUT THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED.
10. “I WILL GO,” SAID MOSHE, “AND SEE THIS GREAT SIGHT. WHY THE BUSH IS NOT BURNT UP.”
11. AND WHEN HASHEM SAW MOSHE TURN ASIDE TO SEE, G-D CALLED TO HIM FROM THE MIDST OF THE BUSH AND SAID: “MOSHE, MOSHE.: AND HE SAID, “HERE I AM.”
12. AND HASHEM SAID, “DON’T GET ANY CLOSER; TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF YOUR FEET BECAUSE THE PLACE WHICH YOU STAND IS HOLY GROUND.”
13. We are going to come back to some of these lines and what they mean on a deeper level, but first let me address a question that may be rattling in some of your minds. You might be asking yourself, “OK, groovy – Daniel wants to talk about Moe and the burning bush. Great – but NU! - why did he have to first give us a lesson in the lives of Jesus and Buddha?” Oh Oh! – We’re back to the Holy goyim again.
14. Even if you weren’t thinking of this question, let me answer it – The tests that Yoshki and Gautama Buddha went through were internal – they wrestled with the demons and challenges inside of themselves before they got their initial enlightening messages. This is not the case with Moshe – his tests were external – he wasn’t dealing with his internal struggles, he was wresting with the challenges of the world out here. How? – He did it

* By growing up under the influences of a Jewish mother and an Egyptian princess
* By extension, living as both a Jew and an Egyptian
* By killing a murderous slave driver in Egypt,
* By chiding two quarreling Hebrews the next day– who were under the influence of slave mentality – and who may have turned Moses in to the Egyptian authorities for killing their slave master
* Bu running away from his Egyptian home and seeking a new life in Midian
* By fighting off the shepherd thugs who were intimating his future father-in-law’s daughters,
* By getting married and having kids (oh my G-d, that is Sooo Jewish),
* And, finally, by settling down into a new job as a shepherd of his father-in-law’s sheep.

1. Only after all of these external tests and challenges did he come upon the burning bush. Moshe’s path to the moment of enlightenment was through this world, not through the mental, individual, existential realm that JC and Buddha traveled in.
2. Moshe later extended his experience with worldly tests by fighting on the ground for the liberation of his people, and, by extension, all people with the message that they can be freed from slavery both internal and external.
3. The Jewish path that Moshe (and Hashem) set is one of actualizing our spiritual growth through our actions in this world. That is what the Mitzva system is, at its root, what its all about. In other words the best way to be Jewish – and human – is to do Jewish. And in Moshe’s case, this was doing what it took to free us from the oppression of Pharaoh and Egypt.
4. OK, now let’s finish by looking at two little parts of the burning bush story.
5. First – EX 3:2 says that Moses noticed this bush and,

“…HE SAW THAT BEHOLD: THE BUSH WAS BURNING IN THE FIRE BUT THE BUSH WAS NOT CONSUMED.

1. So here’s the question that Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, a Reform Rabbi, renown writer and Kabbalah Scholar, asked: “Nu! – how did Moshe know that the bush was not burning up? How long did he have to look to figure that out?” Reb Lawrence put this to the test by taking a branch from a bush in his front yard and closely watching it burn in his fire place. Later, he reported his findings: “it took me at least 17-seconds to determine that the branch was in fact burning up.” The point: that Moshe had developed the patience to really take things in, to pay attention – and because of that he was present enough to see that this was no ordinary burning bush. (It is also from this incident that we know that it was Jews who invented Mindfulness!)
2. A second teaching comes from Rabbi Yoseph of Yapol, who was the son of Yechiel Michal, a disciple of the BESHT. Remember the BESHT, or the Baal Shem Tov, was the founder of the Chassidic Movement. So Yoseph of Yapol - who was better know by his friends as Reb YY – he brought down a great teaching that can give us a sense of how we can engage in what Moshe did so we can find our own messages and connect to G!d.
3. Reb YY focused on the fifth sentence in Exodus, Chapter Three where Moshe is approaching the bush and HaShem says,

*AL TIKRAG HA-LOM SHAL NE’ALECHA MAYAL RAGLECHA, KI HAMAKOM ASHER ATA O-MEYD ALAV, ADMAT KODESH HU*

“Don’t come any closer; take your shoes off of your *RAGLECHA* - off your feet - because the place where you are standing is Holy Ground.”

1. So Reb YY drashes it like this: “HaShem says ‘do not come any closer’ – do not get close to worrying about how you should be, let go of thinking to yourself: ‘if only I had this and this, or could do this and this, I would be able to worship HaShem and connect to Him so much better.” Reb YY says don’t wait to be in the perfect internal state. He said, quoting the passage: “Instead, ‘take your shoes off of your RAGLECHA, off your feet,’ that is to say, set aside the foolishness of your usual habits and practices (REGILUT)’”
2. Just to clarify, the word for feet, RAGLECHA, can be related to the word for habits, REGILUT.
3. So the Rebbe is saying that: “If you take off your REGILUT, you set aside these distracting habits, you’ll see that ‘the place where you stand RIGHT NOW is holy ground.” In that place wherever you are - you can connect with HaShem.”
4. He continues, “In other words, as the BESHT said, first quoting Exodus 3:5 - ‘…the place where you are standing is holy ground,’“ and then quoting Deut 4:29, where it says,

*“U-MIKASHTEM MI-SHAM ET HASHEM ELOHEYCHA…”*

“But **from there** you will seek HaShem your God; and you shalt find Him, if you search with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”

1. The Baal Shem Tov continues, “It is precisely from the place where you are – with no external habits or gimmicks, just opening your heart and soul, no matter what level you are on, even if you don’t think you are such hot stuff or very enlightened, nevertheless 🡪 opening your heart “from there” you will hear your enlightening messages and establish your relationship with G-d.” You can be at the hot dog stand, or watching Hula and it can happen right there.
2. You don’t even need to depend on G-d for this, you don’t need to wait for some ethereal internal state to fill you up, or to have the right thought - Just do like Moshe and walk up to the bush that is drawing you in and take a close look with your eyes and your soul. Drop the other stuff and just be there where you are in this world.
3. So I want to bless you and please bless me back that we all can look at this world from the heart-place of patience and true presence, that we can release ourselves from unhelpful habits that prevent us from seeing that where we are right now is the right place to relate with G-d, the community and the world. And I bless us that we don’t wait for some special internal state, but to open ourselves to this world, to the positive life-changing messages that await us where we are right now!

**Good Shabbos**