Many times people see things that are very powerful, but it does not cause any significant change to their lives. America was rocked by 9/11. Everyone is moved by the situation in Gaza. But for many, the novelty wears off and soon life continues as usual.

The father of a close friend of mine related that his son, daughter-in-law, and three grandchildren were in a boating accident. They had life jackets, but the water was frigid and some of them developed hypothermia. It was only through Divine Providence that they were located and saved just in time.

Immediately after finding out about the accident, my father’s friend wanted to do something concrete to show his gratitude to G-d. He started by waking up an hour earlier every day to set aside time to study Torah. He committed to facilitate the building of a neighborhood synagogue that had been years in the planning but long in coming. Three years later, the synagogue was built, he was still keeping his Torah study regimen, and his entire life was changed — all because he seized the moment when he saw a message from G-d.

In his commentary on Song of Songs (2:7), Nachmanides discusses the importance of translating inspiration into physical action. Inspiration is a fleeting emotion which, on its own, has a very short lifespan. Putting inspiration into action gives it staying power. If we hear about a soldier who was just wounded in Israel, we can feel terrible, but it is so much more meaningful if we can say a small prayer for that soldier. When we wake up and walk outside into a glorious morning with the sun shining brightly and the air crisp and refreshing, we can think about what a nice day it is, or we can say thanks to G-d for giving us such a beautiful day. And when we hear the news about yet one more rocket attack on Sderot, we can commit to studying ten minutes of Torah every day on behalf of our brothers and sisters living through such difficult times. Like Moses, putting insight into action makes us qualified to be true leaders.

Parsha Perspectives
RABBI LEIBY BURNHAM

"Moses said, ‘Let me turn now and see this great spectacle – why does the thorn bush not burn up?’” (Exodus 3:3)

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"And Moses ḳayował to live with the man [Jethro], and he gave him his daughter Tziporah as his wife” (Exodus 2:21). Targum Onkelos translates מואל as Moses “desired or wanted.” The word also appears in Genesis (18:27) and in Deuteronomy (1:5), and in both places Rashi translates the term as began. Rav Yaakov Zvi Mecklenburg (Haktav Vehakabbalah, Exodus ibid.) relates the word to the root אייל — ein — strength. He explains that while someone is deciding something, the idea goes back and forth in his mind. Once he decides on a course of action, he gives power and strength to one side of the debate, so that vayovel means “he firmly decided.”
A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS

And these are the names of the Children of Israel...” (Exodus 1:1). The commentaries point out that even in exile the Jews did not change their names (Baal Haturim). Rabbi Moshe Feinstein was asked, given that the Midrash (Leviticus Rabba 32) attributes part of the merit for the redemption from Egypt to the fact that the Jews did not change their names, is it permitted to be called by a non-Jewish name? Rabbi Feinstein permits the use of a non-Jewish name and notes that many great rabbis had non-Jewish names, such as Maimon, father of Maimonides; Rabbi Vidal, author of the Magid Mishneh; and even a Rabbi Peter, cited by Tosafos (Gittin 8a). He explains that when the Jews were in Egypt and had not yet received the Torah, the only way to separate themselves from the Egyptians was by not changing their names, clothing, and language. However, now that we have the Torah and mitzvos, their observance is sufficient and we do not need to be so careful about other things, like names (Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim, 4:66, see Minchas Asher, Exodus 1:1 for other opinions).

Table Talk

FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

G-d chose Moses as His emissary to redeem the Jews from Egypt. But Moses demurred, saying, “I am not a man of words... for I am heavy of mouth and heavy of speech” (Shmos 4:10).

Moses is known as the individual who maximally taught and obeyed the Torah. Yet he was fighting G-d, as it were, refusing his first assignment. Why would Moses even consider thwarting the will of the Al-mighty?

Moses’s concern was that he was physically unfit for the job G-d was giving him. How does the fact that G-d would place the words in his mouth assuage his concerns?

HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT!

The birth of Moses is described in a very unusual manner in the Torah. The verse states, “A man from the House of Levi married a daughter of Levi, and she became pregnant and gave birth to a boy...” (Exodus 2:1-2). The Torah does not mention the father’s name, the mother’s name, or the child’s name. Later, when Moses was in the basket in the Nile, we are told that “his sister watched from afar,” (ibid. 2:4); again, no name for his sister, or, for that matter, for Pharaoh’s daughter, who saved Moses, but is also not named. We only find out the name of Moses’ older brother, Aaron, in the fourth chapter of Exodus, and his parents’ names only in chapter 6 (v. 20). The Maharal explains that the anonymity surrounding the birth of Moses is teaching us that the redemption of the Jewish people is a historical inevitability, not dependent on the choices of specific individuals and certainly not in their hands. Rather, the destiny of the Jews is to be redeemed, to return to the land of Israel, and to return to G-d.