

## **The Diamond in the Cesspool (Shemot)**

*Each of us is like a diamond, and each of us has the potential to be brilliant. -Simon T. Bailey*

The Egypt of our ancestors was apparently one of great moral depravity. Egyptian culture was submerged in a superficial, materialistic, hedonistic, idol-worshipping, incestuous reality. A by-product of such a society was many unwanted births and a cheapening of life.

At the beginning of the Book of Exodus, the Children of Israel have evolved from honored guests and royal protégés to feared enemies and eventually downtrodden slaves. The low point of this progression is perhaps the draconian edict to kill all newborn Jewish boys.

Into this environment, Moses is born. Fearing for his life, the mother of Moses takes the desperate measure of placing the three-month-old into a basket to float on the river. Moses' sister, not without hope, keeps an eye on the basket (Exodus 2).

Pharaoh's daughter spots Moses' basket while bathing in the Nile. She investigates and is surprised to find baby Moses within.

At this point, Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475-1549) asks why Pharaoh's daughter would claim Moses. Sforno explains that it was apparently common practice for Egyptians to discard unwanted children into the river, and there would be a plethora of abandoned children to be claimed.

Sforno answers that the "goodness" of Moses was "shining" and was clearly visible for anyone to see. Pharaoh's daughter said to herself: "This is not some bastard or unwanted child. This is a beautiful Israelite child. He is so stunningly gorgeous that I must claim him for myself."

Sforno continues to explain that Moses was visibly outstanding because of the "ingredients" put into him. Following is a translation of Sforno's comment regarding the reaction to the birth of Moses by his mother, that "he was good":

"She noted that he was more beautiful than normal and thought that this was for an intended purpose from his Creator, for the beauty of the form indicates the quality of the ingredients and the complete power of the Designer."

As we all know, Moses was indeed intended for supreme greatness, even amidst the decadence and immorality of Egyptian culture.

May we all transcend the negative environments around us, and like Moses, take the great ingredients that are a part of us – and shine.

Shabbat Shalom,

Ben-Tzion

*Dedication*

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