

Courage is Born [By Mendel Kalmenson](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3555089/jewish/A-Courage-Epidemic.htm) (Full article: https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/3555089/jewish/A-Courage-Epidemic.htm)

Nelson Mandela once said: “It always seems impossible until it is done.”

Impossible is a word that comes to mind when describing the new reality facing the Hebrews in Egypt. Our sages relate that not a single slave had ever been able to escape from Egypt, so well protected were its borders. And yet, at the end of this narrative, an entire nation of slaves would march out of Egypt’s gates to freedom.

But for the impossible to become possible, many things had to happen—not least of which was the spreading of the infectious human virtue we call courage.

If the story of the Exodus teaches us anything about courage it is that courage isn't something you are born with, but grow into. As Nelson Mandela said, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Another important thing we learn from the Exodus story is that courage is contagious.

What follows are the stories of a few individuals who infected others with their courage, inspiring those around them to reach greatness.

According to our sages, Yocheved, the mother of Moses, was the brave midwife who dared to defy the decree of Pharaoh to kill all newborn Jewish males: “The midwives, however, feared G-d; so they did not do as the king of Egypt had spoken to them, but they enabled the boys to live.”²...The second portrait of courage is Miriam, Yocheved’s daughter.

The Talmud recounts the following tale:

Moses' father, Amram, was the greatest man of his generation; when he saw that the wicked Pharaoh had decreed, “Every son that is born you shall cast into the river,” he said: “In vain do we labor.” He went and divorced his wife. All the Israelites arose and divorced their wives.

Said his daughter to him: “Father, your decree is more severe than Pharaoh's. Pharaoh decreed only against the males; you have decreed against the males and females. In the case of the wicked Pharaoh there is a doubt whether his decree will be fulfilled or not; in your case, it will certainly be fulfilled.” So Amram went and remarried his wife; and they all arose and took back their wives.³ Inspired by her mother's sacrifice to preserve life, Miriam courageously instigated a risky Jewish baby-boom. One woman's courage spread to another woman, and subsequently to many more. . .

Months after little Moses was born, he was placed in a reed basket at the Nile River's edge in order to evade the genocidal authorities. A remarkable act of courage followed. Pharaoh's daughter, Batya, who was out bathing at the time, discovered the basket with Moses in it. Quite possibly inspired by the parents of this newborn, who risked bringing a child into such a dangerous world, Batya decided to raise the child as her own, in defiance of her father's decree and at great personal risk...

When they arrived in Egypt, the Hebrews were inspired by Moses and Aaron's courageous mission to speak truth to power, and the downtrodden Hebrews lifted their eyes heavenward for the first time in centuries, exhibiting one of the greatest feats of human courage: the ability to believe in the impossible.

The final show of courage in this narrative is described in the closing verses of Parshat Shemot: The officers of the children of Israel whom Pharaoh's taskmasters had appointed over them were beaten, saying, “Why have you not completed your quota to make bricks like the day before yesterday, neither yesterday nor today?”⁹ Rashi comments: The officers were Israelites, and they had pity on their fellows, [and did] not press them. They would turn the bricks over to the taskmasters, who were Egyptians, and when something was missing from the [required] amount, they [the Egyptians] would flog them [the officers] because they did not press the workers.¹⁰

There you have it: It was contracted by a mother, who transmitted it to her daughter, who infected her father, who spread it to an Egyptian princess, and passed it on to his son, who shared it with his father-in-law and wife, and then with his brother, and then with an entire people; the highly potent and contagious courage-epidemic started by a humble act of rebellion spread quickly, touching everyone in its wake, and ultimately bringing change to an entire world.

Exodus Chapter 21

1And these are the ordinances that you shall set before them.

2Should you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall work [for] six years, and in the seventh [year], he shall go out to freedom without charge.

3If he comes [in] alone, he shall go out alone; if he is a married man, his wife shall go out with him.

4If his master gives him a wife, and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and he shall go out alone.

5But if the slave says, "I love my master, my wife, and my children. I will not go free,"

6his master shall bring him to the judges, and he shall bring him to the door or to the doorpost, and his master shall **bore his ear with an awl, and he shall serve him forever.**

and his master shall bore his ear: [i.e.,] the right [ear]. Or perhaps it means the left one? Therefore, the Torah states אָזן "ear," here and אֲזַן [elsewhere] for [the purpose of making] a גְּזֵרָה שְׁוֵהָ, [which means two places having similar wording, which indicates that the rulings pertaining to one situation also apply to the other]. It is stated here: "and his master shall bore his ear," and it is stated regarding the mezora [person with the disease of zara'ath]: "the cartilage of the right ear of the one who is becoming pure" ([Lev. 14:14](#)). Just as there the right [ear] is specified, here too the right [ear] is meant. **Now, why was the ear chosen to be bored out of all the organs of the body?**

Rabban Jochanan ben Zakkai said: The ear that heard on Mount Sinai, "You shall not steal" ([Exod. 20:13](#)) and [then] went and stole, shall be bored. And if [the text is referring to] one who sold himself [into servitude, the reason is that] the ear that heard, "For the children of Israel are slaves to Me" ([Lev. 25:55](#)) and [then] went and acquired a master for himself, [this ear] shall be bored. Rabbi Shimon used to interpret this verse [in a beautiful manner] like a bundle of pearls [or a great amount of perfume in this way:]—**why were the door and the doorpost singled out from all the fixtures in the house? The Holy One, blessed is He, said: The door and the doorpost were witnesses in Egypt when I passed over the lintel and the two doorposts, and I said, "For the children of Israel are slaves to Me; they are My slaves," but [they are] not slaves to slaves, and [yet] this one went and acquired for himself a master—[his ear] shall be bored before them [for everyone to see].** — [From Kid. 22b]

אוֹלֵלָה הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים אֲשֶׁר תִּשֶׁם לִפְנֵיהֶם:

בְּכִי תִקְנֶה עֶבֶד עִבְרִי שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים יַעֲבֹד וּבִשְׁבַעַת יֵצֵא לְחֶפְשׁ חָנּוּם:

גַּאֲם־בְּגִפּוֹ יָבֵא בְּגִפּוֹ יֵצֵא אִם־בְּעַל אִשָּׁה הוּא יֵצֵאָה אִשְׁתּוֹ עִמּוֹ:

דֹּאֲם־אֲדָנִיו יִתֵּן־לּוֹ אִשָּׁה וְיִלְדֶּה־לּוֹ בָּנִים אֹ אוֹ בָּנוֹת הָאִשָּׁה וְיִלְדֶּיהָ תִּהְיֶה לְאֲדֹנָיָהּ וְהוּא יֵצֵא בְּגִפּוֹ:

הוּא־אִמְרָ יֵאמֶר הָעֶבֶד אֶהְבֵּתִי אֶת־אֲדֹנִי אֶת־אִשְׁתִּי וְאֶת־בְּנֵי לֹא אֵצֵא חֶפְשִׁי:

וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֲדָנָיו אֶל־הַקָּלָהִים וְהִגִּישׁוּ אֶל־הַדֹּלֶת אֹ אוֹ אֶל־הַמְּזוּזָה וְרָצַע אֲדָנָיו אֶת־אָזְנוֹ בַּמַּרְצֵעַ וְעִבְדוֹ לְעֹלָם:

ורצע א-דניו את אזנו במרצע: הימנית. או אינו אלא של שמאל, תלמוד לומר אֶזֶן, אֶזֶן לגזרה שוה נאמר כאן ורצע אדוניו את אזנו, ונאמר במצורע (ויקרא יד יד) תנוך אֶזֶן המטהר הימנית, מה להלן הימנית, אף כאן הימנית. ומה ראה אֶזֶן להרצע מכל שאר אברים שבגוף, אמר רבי יוחנן בן זכאי (קדושין כב ע"ב) אֶזֶן זאת ששמעה על הר סיני לא תגנוב, והלך וגנב, תרצע. ואם מוכר עצמו, אֶזֶן ששמעה על הר סיני (ויקרא כה נה) כי לי בני ישראל עבדים, והלך וקנה אדון לעצמו, תרצע. ר' שמעון היה דורש מקרא זה כמין חומר מה נשתנו דלת ומזוזה מכל כלים שבבית, אמר הקב"ה דלת ומזוזה שהיו עדים במצרים כשפסחתי על המשקוף ועל שתי המזוזות ואמרתי כי לי בני ישראל עבדים, עבדי הם ולא עבדים לעבדים, והלך זה וקנה אדון לעצמו, ירצע בפניהם: