

א ביסל תורה!

February 6, 2026

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

י"ט שבט תשפ"ז · יתרו

Two Sons Both First?

By Eliana Goldenholz '26

This week's *פְּרָשָׁה* is packed with Jewish law, philosophy, and history. There is a lot to talk about regarding the *פְּרָשָׁה* and there are many famous ideas. However, there is a less known detail, one that is tucked into the brief account of *משה*'s two sons, that will be this *דָבָר תורה*'s focus. The *תּוֹרָה* records their names and the reasons behind them: "אֲשֶׁר שָׁם הַאֲחָד" "of whom one was named" as he said 'I have been a stranger in a foreign land'" "וַיִּשְׁמֶן הַאֲחָד אֶלְيָזָר פִּי-אָבִי בָּעָזָר וַיַּצְלַחַנִי'" "and the other was named *אליעזר*, as 'the G-d of my father was my help and saved me from the sword of *פְּרָעָה*' (שמות יח:ג-ד)". At first glance, there is nothing unusual here. Often names get brief explanations. But a closer look reveals something odd: "הַאֲחָד" "the one" appears twice. As in, both children are introduced as "the one." Why two "firsts"? Shouldn't have been called "the second"? While perhaps the English translation makes the phrasing work, in Hebrew, the *פסוק* reads rather strangely.

This oddity caught the attention of many commentators. *חיזקיהו* explains this word choice rather simply: *גרשומ* could not initially be circumcised due to *משה*'s agreement with *יתרו*. Once *אליעזר* was circumcised, it made him - spiritually and covenantally - the first son entered into Hashem's covenant. Therefore, the *תּוֹרָה* calls him the first, a title of primacy. Though *גרשומ* was the first in age, *אליעזר*

is also called 'האחד' because of his eighth-day circumcision.

comes at this from a different point of view. The word "האחד" hints that from *אליעזר*'s single son, his line would grow extraordinarily numerous. Having more children does not guarantee greater descendants; rather, Hashem can bring extraordinary multiplicity from a single source.

Then the *אור החיים* comes in and reframes the whole discussion. He explains the dual use of "האחד" not through *הלכה* or genealogy, but through the inner truths of *משה*'s being. *משה*'s name recalls a dramatic moment of divine rescue, that is, of G-d saving *משה* from *פְּרָעָה*'s sword. *גרשומ*'s name reflects something deeper still. According to the *אור החיים*, when *משה* was a stranger in a foreign land it speaks not only of geography, but of his existential stance. *משה* felt himself a stranger in this world itself. His sense of alienness, of not fully belonging to the ordinary plane of human life, was not a mood or a phase; it was fundamental to him. And *משה* acknowledged that inner truth by giving his first son a name that embodies it.

Two sons, two names, two primacies: the inner one of alienness and the outer one of divine rescue. Through *גרשומ*, we get insight about who *משה* is in this world, and through *אליעזר* who *משה* becomes once Hashem enters the world he's in. While this may feel unsatisfying to many readers, as I am not ending with an explicit moral or *הלכה*, trying to recognize the

This month's issue is not sponsored! If you would like to sponsor a future month of A Bisl Torah please visit our website

To read past issues or
sponsor future visit
ABISLTORAH.ORG

significance to this specific language in these innocent-looking פטוקים is just as important. משה remains one of the most complicated figures in תנ"ך and the Jewish people's history. He was a man who did not belong in our world, a man who lived in a different spiritual plane than others, yet his mission in life only happens in this world. At משה's core was an existential tension.

Leadership and Help

By Nadav Leibowitz '27

It is strange how משה רבינו, the man who spoke with G-d constantly and is known as the greatest prophet ever, needed help at the beginning of the week's פרשנה. This advice also came from someone who was not a part of בני ישראל but rather a priest in מדיין. משה רבינו watches בני ישראל and notices that משה needs help because every Israelite who needed help always went to משה. Even though משה sees that משה is doing a very holy task and giving the word of G-d to help the people, says: "לא-טוב הדבר אשר עשָׂה" "The thing you are doing is not right" (שםותה זח:ז). The one of the only other times we see the תורה say "לא-טוב הדבר" "the thing is not good" is when G-d sees that it is not good for אדם הראשון to be alone "לא-טוב קיומם לבדו" "it is not good for man to be alone" (בראשית ב:ז). This also applies to משה in this circumstance when he has judged בני ישראל all by himself with no help. outright tells משה that what he is doing is not right and that he needs help. משה

understands that what יתרכז is saying is right and that while he was tasked with a very important job he must still be careful about himself and not to burn himself out with all this work. יתרכז teaches that leadership is not about doing everything by one's self but rather doing what is best for everyone, even the leaders themselves. The תורה is telling us that we cannot receive the תורה until we learn how to help ourselves first and then focus on helping others. Only after this moment, only after משה learns what is best for בני ישראל and himself, do בני ישראל arrive at הר סיני and receive the תורה.



Receive A BISL TORAH
on WhatsApp

A BISL TORAH
is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

If you would like to receive A Bisl Torah via
Email, Email bisltorah@maimonides.org

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Eitan Orkaby '27
Theo Fraenkel '28
EDITORS
Anna Szalat '28
Noah Levy '29
Joshua Jaffe '29

FACULTY ADVISOR
Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe
FOUNDERS
Binyamin Orkaby '24
Ephraim Fischer '24