

*Devar Torah (Sermon) for Shemoth*  
"The True Nature of a Hero"  
*Re: Barack Obama Inauguration*  
January 17, 2009 - כ"א טבת תשס"ט

This week's Torah portion introduced us to the greatest prophet of Jewish history, *Moshe Rabenu*, "Moses, Our teacher." in some ways, Moses' birth reflects a common motif in ancient stories - that of the birth of a hero. In other respects, the story is the opposite of the normal hero birth story. The derash commentary in the *Etz Chayim* chumash points out the similarities and differences, writing:

The story of Moses' birth and early years contains many elements common to hero legends: the special child, endangered at birth but rescued undergoes a period of separation and then returns as a changed person with a mission. But there is one difference. The typical hero, of noble birth, is raised by peasants and ultimately returns to his lofty origins. Moses, an Israelite raised in Pharaoh's palace, returns to his people as if to suggest that it was nobler to be a common Israelite than an Egyptian prince.

This observation, reminds us that although the story of one individual's rise to greatness is inspiring, the more important question is whether those who achieve greatness become champions of justice and success for the common person.

This Tuesday, America will take a great step forward, ushering in an era where any child growing up in our country can know that their potential is limitless, and that despite the obstacles, they can achieve true greatness. But the measure of American success, indeed, the measure of true justice, will not be whether one boy or girl can achieve greatness, but whether the common person can know the gifts of prosperity, dignity, and justice.

And so, the question for the future is not whether a black man, or an asian woman, or a Jewish person could become President. We know the answer to that question already. The true question is whether our society can insure that any hardworking individual can find a job that pays a living wage and provide their family with shelter, food, health care and education.

We should all look on with great pride this Tuesday at noon. Whether we celebrate the political result or mourn it, we should see the social reality as a wonderful one . . . one which many of us believed we would never live to see. But there are even greater achievements that we long to see. Not everyone can become the president, or serve in congress or in state government. But we pray that every person can know the benefit of a government that cares deeply about the fortunes of each of its constituents, and a government that is blessed with the wisdom from heaven to achieve prosperity, liberty, and justice, for all.