

Parshas Shemos

This week's parsha Shemos, is the first parsha of the second book of Chumash. As I wrote about last year, the first conspiracy theory against the Jews was issued by Paroah to his people. He made up a story about a supposed "war" that the Jews would turn their backs against the Egyptians and drive them out of the land. When Paroah could have turned to them and created an ally (assuming their strength), yet he started a phased project of devolving Egyptian society such that they would ultimately enslave their neighbors.

Phase 1: The "new" king forgets his history and makes up new laws and edicts. This follows conveniently after Yosef help the king become more powerful than ever, by securing more land as a tradeoff for people to buy produce during the famine.

Phase 2: He plants the seed of doubt in his people's minds, about a supposed threat that needs to be dealt with. He creates a well-crafted conspiracy that the Jews are strong, and if there shall be a war, they *may* turn against us. There was no effort to win the Jews as allies.

Phase 3: He taxes the people, subjecting them to debts which they cannot pay other than through crushing labor. This alongside a message of hate, turns the locals against their neighbors, especially, since the Jews replaced the work of the Egyptians.

Phase 4: He subjects the people to hard labor to take over the work of the locals, and the people now own the nation as slaves, and they are dehumanized (posuk 12- "Vayakutz mipnei bnei yisrael"- they were disgusted by the Jews; this follows how the Posuk describes their growth, "Vayishritzu- teeming" which is rooted in the word Sheretz, creepy crawler. This is how the local people viewed the Jews). But as Medrish Tanchuma says and quoted in Rashi, that the Jewish women gave birth to 6

children at a time, connected to the 6 phrases used to describe their growth. (6 is not a coincidence, it is a kabbalistic number).

Phase 5: He completes the torture and subjugation of the Jews to the Egyptian control by ordering the killing of the babies.

Rashi is used to explain these phases. Nothing from 3500 years ago has changed. Societies may seem more sophisticated today, but nothing about the phases are different than what happens today and happened in 1930's Europe.

An interesting point to note, on posuk 10 "hava nischakma" Rashi explains that the Egyptians were trying to outsmart Hashem by afflicting the Jews with water they will alleviate potential punishment, because Hashem promised not to bring another flood on the world (this means on the entire world not one nation). Perhaps this is why the first punishment on the Egyptians was of blood in their waters.

The haftora for Ashkenazim is from Yeshayahu 27:6-28:13; 29-22-23 and for Sephardim it is from Yirmiyahu 1:1-2:3.

The haftora from Yeshayahu talks about Hashem's vineyard, and that there will be a great ingathering (related to Mashiach) and the Haftora breaks and skips a pesukim and concludes at chapter 29 with the words of redemption. Following chapter 29 in chapter 30 Yeshayahu criticizes Israel for its reliance on Egypt and precedes with a prophecy on the resurrection of the dead. The first part of the Haftora focused on the vineyard of Hashem that will be the Jews speckled all over the world could be reference to the fact that secrets (which is revealed through wine) will be revealed in the world in a clear and true way. It is also through Torah that Mashiach will come, and it is through Torah that the whole world is sustained. This is connected to the

Parsha, in that just as the Jews were beginning the downward spiral into slavery (which was a phased process) ultimately, they came out of it, and were given the Torah on Har Sinai. This is a foreshadow to what will happen with us, and we will have our own revelation on our own Har Sinai, at the end of our Golus. The wine reference does have negative connotations as part of the prophecy of Yeshayahu, but in the context of a messianic message, perhaps we can derive the positive message.

The Haftora for Sephardim from Yirmiyahu follows the same theme as above. Yirmiyahu was the prophet who lived prior to and prophesied about the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, but that the second Beis Hamikdash would ultimately be rebuilt, which applied today, is the foreshadow for what is to come with Mashiach. The Haftora also blends into the one that is read on Masei (which is the parsha of the Jews journey through the desert, leading to the entry into the promised land; there were 42 stops as the Baal Shem Tov explains is the same for the Neshama of a Jew from birth until it returns to its Source.) Yirmiyahu's call to prophecy- even though he felt he was unworthy- can be a lesson for us, as we find ourselves in Golus, against our will, and we may feel we are unworthy of brining Mashiach, but the opposite is true, we are the generation chosen to do so. Yirmiyahu has a vision of an almond tree- due to the quick nature in which it grows, and regardless of what outside forces say to you, be true to the mission. (As well it could be a metaphor referring to the swift nature in which redemption can arise, as well as the quick nature in which the Jews multiplied in Egypt) The conclusion of the Haftora reminds us of the days when the Jews steadfastly were led out of exile into the wilderness, notwithstanding this, Hashem still loves us, even if we aren't like the days of old. The visions of hope for a better time are important

here, as the haftora links Shemos to Masei where we've already travelled and left exile. Much in the same way this is our beacon of home, that we are still in Golus, but this is the journey, inching our way closer and closer to the Mashiach era. Just as Shemos begins the golus, and what is to befall the Jews, we know that what is written in the narrative, is the redemption.

Because the script of Shemos is applicable (albeit negatively) even in modern times, this logically means that the words of the prophets must also be true, and the script for what is to come, which is the message of Mashiach. Torah will be revealed, and its Truth will shine forth. Which is the haftora of Yeshayahu on Parshas Bereishis, whereby the prophet who arises will be accepted by all. The theme of the first parsha of the book of Shemos follows the same theme.

The Alter Rebbe asks in Parshas Masei why the journeys are called out of Egypt, when there was only one journey out of Egypt (the first one), everything else is the journey in the wilderness (on the first posuk 33:1). Because the Alter Rebbe explains, Mitzraim means narrow, which is a state of mind. The lesson from the Haftora and the Parsha therefore, is to not be narrow, and in the Mitzraim mindset; rather the journey is to be out spreading the light of Torah, and refining our Neshamos, and lives.

Good Shabbos!