

Parshas Shemos

This week is the first Parsha of the second book of Chumash, literally titled “names,” as it reflects on the retelling of the names of the tribes, which Rashi explains, are mentioned because of the love Hashem shows his people. The whole book, therefore, is themed around the love Hashem and the Jews have for one another, meaning whenever you think about the book, you think about the connection Hashem and we have. Throughout the rest of the Chumash, this reason remains true: every time Hashem counts us, even after a predicament, it shows the love between Hashem and His people.

Baal Haturim, on the first Posuk, explains, using mnemonics, that the Jews were saved for not changing their names, and keeping Shabbos. Baal Haturim explains that the first and last letter of the posuk is vov, with the numerical value six. This represents the 12 tribes and the support, and foundation we had (by keeping basic tenets of our faith), like the vovey (spelled vov vov) *amudim*, foundational pillars of the Mishkan. I want to expand this further to say that the first letter of the Parsha (and sefer) and the last letter, which is a mem, numerically equals 46. The 46th chapter in Tehillim talks about the violent upheavals of the nations surrounding the Jews as a precursor to the coming of Mashiach, specifically, that Hashem will protect us. The third posuk in chapter 46 talks about the physically changing earth and resulting upheavals. This is clear in our times. We are inundated with the concept of a changing world, specifically “climate change,” Countries worldwide are making great strides to combat this. This prediction in

Tehillim is coming true. Meaning the following prophecy in Tehillim must also be true, that it is a precursor to Mashiach, which is imminently due.

Ultimately, Shemos and the Golus Mitzraim prepared the nation for receiving the Torah. The Alter Rebbe, in Torah Ohr, explains that this demotion of the nation into slavery, and the trials, tribulations and challenges of having experienced that, is the method through which we were able to receive the Torah, the ultimate gift, manifested, as opposed to a spiritual dream. The whole purpose of the Golus was to be redeemed and receive the Torah (Torah Ohr, Shemos). Furthermore, the challenges and length of the Golus were for the merit of accepting the hidden (penimios) of the Torah, mainly the reasons for the Torah which we will obtain when Mashiach arrives (The Alter Rebbe further elucidates this point by comparing the language of Torah- to the words used to describe the difficulties of the Jews.

Baal Haturim explains that the Jews kept Shabbos, and this was one of the reasons for which they were saved. But, if we interpret slavery, it didn't seem like there was an opportunity for the Jews to “keep” Shabbos. There are a few answers; first, they didn't have the Torah, so they didn't have to “keep the Shabbos,” as we understand. But we can argue that the Jews kept the Torah before the physical revelation on Har Sinai.

Baal Haturim states “Shamor” about how he explains their faith. We know there are two expressions regarding keeping Shabbos. Zachor and Shamor. Zachor refers to keeping all the positive commandments of Shabbos or active mitzvos, versus Shamor,

which is to guard oneself against breaking any negative commandments. R'Chiya Bar Aba says in the name of Rabbi Yochanan (Shabbos 118b), "anyone who is Shamor Shabbos (observes) according to all its laws, even if that person worshipped idols with the same fervour as the generation of Enosh will be forgiven." Arizal and R'Aaron Karliner offer a spiritual explanation of how one is absolved of idol worship, a sin punishable by death. The connection the Neshama of a person makes by keeping Shabbos has the power to move the transgressions. Ultimately by truly keeping Shabbos, one recognizes the sovereignty of Hashem on the universe and that the ultimate ruler is Hashem. By doing so, we confirm His kingship over us (much like we get Arichas Yamim for contemplating and lengthening Echad at the end of Shema, we achieve the same goal.)

The Torah telling us these 'stories' of slavery must have a lesson that can be learned, specifically a derech in Hashkafa that makes us better servants of Hashem. The details of the enslavement are very calculated because it ultimately is the vision for the galus that we are in, that we are here now (albeit for a long time) so that we can be ready to welcome Mashiach.

Rashi on posuk five that Yosef was in Egypt is to tell us that Yosef was righteous. But Rashi states that this is the same Yosef who was the shepherd for his father. This detail is important to me, as it suggests that Yosef's journey to Egypt was intentional. The rest of the Aliya talks about the new Pharaoh's rise and that he "didn't know Yosef." He acted as if he didn't know Yosef (according to Rashi), specifically Rashi drawing on the Gemara in Sotah 11a that Rav and Shmuel talk about a literal new king

or just the establishment of new rules. Both point out that this new king ignored Yosef's fame and all his nation meant for Egypt. Yosef had been a ruler for 80 years, in addition to the notoriety he garnered for saving Egypt (and possibly nationalizing farming). He is the direct cause of Egypt's wealth at that time. Yet this Pharaoh turned on the people; he created and formulated a conspiracy theory (that if we go to war, the Jews may go against us, ally with our enemy, and drive us out of our land. What war was there? Why wouldn't the Pharaoh try to ally for the Jews' support? Instead, he made a compelling argument about us versus them) for which he got the local people to turn on their neighbours. Pharaoh taxed them, and they couldn't pay their taxes, so the people had to work for the state. If the Jews were such a threat (as he posited earlier), wouldn't they revolt against the Egyptians and leave? Mepharshim explains that Pharaoh went down with a shovel and clay to rally the workers (the Jews) who were excited to work alongside the King. This caused the Jews to have unsustainably high output, for which he held them accountable to maintain producing that quota. This was to keep the men at work so long so as not to birth children. The Egyptians ultimately wanted the complete "annihilation by assimilation" of the Jews. These Jews were compliant and willing to work (not a bad trait). Yet, he continued to dehumanize the Jews. He made the Jews look disgusting in the eyes of the neighbours (for having many children), ultimately degrading them to the point of enslaving them and murdering their boys. Shifra and Puah, the chief midwives, disregarded Pharaoh's orders to toss the baby boys into the Nile. They should have been killed for that. Instead, they seemed to remain in their post, and for listening to

Hashem and their sacrifice, they were rewarded in their lives (houses) and the future. The priesthood was borne from them (Yocheved-Shifra, whose offspring, Aaron and Moshe, and King David Miriam-Puah). Instead of going after Shifra and Puah, Pharoah commands the people to act against their neighbour. After this, we are immediately introduced to the birth of the saviour.

I see with the above-highlighted narratives that the Torah is unequivocally relevant to us all these years later. Humans are the same as they were many years ago. The idea that a society cannot devolve into heinous actors is still valid, even today. But instead of highlighting the negative, let's assume the positive. If all the aforementioned can still take place, a fortiori (Kal v'chomer), the outcome of ultimate redemption must happen. Just as the Jews were redeemed from Egypt and received the Torah, brought into the Land of Israel, and built the Temples, so too the final redemption must be true to happen. As the Alter Rebbe states, what is it for, so we can be genuinely revealed the inner essence of all things why, i.e., the P'nimios of the Torah as it is meant to be when Mashiach arrives.

May the revelation happen speedily and obviously in our days, Good Shabbos