

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שמות

ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה את יעקב איש וביתו באו
“And these are the names of Children of Israel who came to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came” (1:1)

The numerical value of the word "mitzrayma" is 385, the same numerical value as the word "shechina." The Gemara in Megilla says that wherever the Jews have gone into exile, the Divine Presence has followed them. Even when we are in exile, we still maintain our special closeness to Hashem. Chazal also state that the Divine Presence is always near the head of a sick person. This shows that Hashem is always near to those who are in need.

When translated literally, the posuk states that the sons of Yaakov "are coming to Egypt," in the present tense. R' Yehoshua of Belz said that this is a message that Jews should always act as if they are only just arriving in the foreign land that they are in, as a guest, and should always be looking forward to returning to Eretz Yisrael, the true homeland of the Jewish people. It is important to remember that the exile is not our home. Remembering this is so important that one of the first questions that a person is asked upon his arrival in heaven is whether he truly yearned for the redemption.

יששכר זבולן ובנימן

“Yissachar, Zevulun, and Binyamin” (1:3)

Leah named her sixth son Yissachar, which is derived from the word "reward," because he was her reward for sharing her *dudaim* with her sister Rachel. However, a child's name, in addition to the past, also reflects what his future holds. Yissachar was the tribe of Torah scholars. The name Yissachar can be translated as "there is reward." This indicates the tremendous reward that awaits those who study Torah. The Mishna states that Torah study receives a reward equal to that of all other mitzvos. There is reward for every moment of effort that one invests in Torah study.

ובני ישראל פרו וישרצו וירבו ויעצמו במאד מאד ותמלא הארץ אתם
“The Children of Israel were fruitful, teemed, increased, and became strong - very, very much so; and the land became filled with them” (1:7)

Chazal explain that the Jews multiplied greatly because each woman gave birth to six children at a time. In Parshas Bamidbar, when the tribes are counted, Shevet Levi only had 22,000 members from the age of one month while the other tribes all had at least double or triple that, even though they were only counted from the ages of twenty through sixty. The Ramban explains this large discrepancy based on this posuk. The blessing of six children at a time was dependent on the suffering of the Jews. This is why the posuk says, "as they afflicted them, so they multiplied." However, the tribe of Levi was not forced to participate in the slave labor. Therefore, the tribe of Levi did not receive this special blessing. While the other tribes expanded, Shevet Levi continued to have the usual number of children. This is why their numbers were so much smaller than all of the other tribes in the desert.

When translated literally, the posuk says "as they will make them suffer," in the future tense. This is a promise to future generations that after the Jewish people undergo suffering, Hashem will give them a blessing that they will continue to multiply and grow. Throughout history, our nation has suffered many difficult times and yet always seems to bounce back and become stronger than ever before. Hashem has kept his promise throughout the generations to always help the Jewish people recover from their difficult times.

ויגדל הילד... ויהי בימים ההם ויגדל משה ויצא אל אחיו וירא בסבלתם וירא איש מצרי מכה איש עברי מאחיו

“The boy grew up...It happened in those days that Moshe grew up and went out to his brothers and saw their burdens; and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man, from his brothers” (2:10-11)

Why does the Torah state twice that Moshe grew up? Rashi says that one was a physical growth and one was a political growth, referring to the fact that he was appointed by Pharaoh to an important position. The Midrash says that the second growing up was because he “went out to his brothers.” Caring for other people and looking out for them is what really made Moshe a great person who was fit to be the leader of the Jewish people. To emphasize this, the posuk says that he saw an Egyptian hitting a Jew “from his brothers.” The main point is that he viewed every single Jew as his brother, not just another Jew. Because of this outlook, he cared very much for each Jew. This is why the Torah stresses the fact that the Jew was his brother. This was one of Moshe’s most important characteristics and is what made him the great man that he was. This compassion and sign of leadership is what is referred to by the second mention of growing up. To be a good leader, one must care for his fellows as brothers and help them whenever they are in trouble. A leader must be there for his flock at all times.

וישמע פרעה את הדבר הזה ויבקש להרג את משה ויברח משה מפני פרעה וישב בארץ מדין וישב על הבאר

“Pharaoh heard this matter and sought to kill Moshe; so Moshe fled from before Pharaoh and settled in the land of Midyan; he sat at the well” (2:15)

Upon arriving in Midyan, Moshe went to the well because he knew that his ancestors Yaakov and Yitzchak had found their spouses by a well. Moshe understood that the first thing he had to do before becoming the leader of the Jewish people was to find a woman to marry and support him in his ideas and beliefs among a foreign culture. That is why Moshe's first mission in a foreign country was to find a wife as a support.

וילך משה וישב אל יתר חתנו ויאמר לו אלכה נא ואשובה אל אחי אשר במצרים ואראה העודם חיים ויאמר יתרו למשה לך שלום

“And Moshe went and he returned to Yeser, his father-in-law, and he said to him, ‘I will go now and return to my brothers that are in Egypt and I will see if they are still alive,’ and Yisro said to Moshe, ‘Go to peace’” (4:18)

Why was Moshe questioning if the Jews were still alive if Hashem had just told him to go to them? The answer is that he was referring to their spiritual living. He wanted to see if his brethren had remained steadfast in their faith and trust in Hashem and true to a life of Torah and mitzvos. This is what Moshe meant by "alive." To live is to keep Torah and mitzvos. Many people are living but are not truly alive because the life that they lead is not a meaningful one. True fulfillment of life can only be found when one lives by the Torah and mitzvos.

ויאמר ה' אל משה עתה תראה אשר אעשה לפרעה כי ביד חזקה ישלחם וביד חזקה יגרשם מארצו “Hashem said to Moshe: Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land” (6:1)

After Moshe complained, Hashem responded that he would see what Hashem would do to Pharaoh but not what He would do to the seven nations in Eretz Canaan. He was punished that he was not able to enter Eretz Yisrael. What did Moshe do wrong by complaining to Hashem? It seems that after Dasan and Aviram criticized Moshe, he immediately turned and complained to Hashem. Often, when a person receives complaints, he grumbles about it to the next person and looks for someone else to pin the blame

on. Moshe should have absorbed the criticism and not have let it affect him and upset him. One should not try to assign blame to someone else and look for scapegoats. Instead, one should realize that there is a root cause to the issue, in Moshe's case, one that was beyond him. Even if it is not the person's fault, he should look deeper into the matter rather than looking for someone else to complain to.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
Shiur given by Rabbi Mayer Friedman
Written by Michael Gutmann