

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## Parshas Shemos

### — Lost and Found in Egypt – Pathways to Exile and Redemption —

#### PART I: LOST WITHOUT TRANSLATION

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיִם

*And these are the names of the Bnei Yisrael who were coming to Mitzrayim<sup>1</sup>*

Our parsha begins the Torah's account of the exile and enslavement in Egypt, with the following three parshiyos describing our redemption therefrom and attaining our status as Hashem's people.

In addition to the pshat meaning of introducing the names of the Bnei Yisrael who came down to Egypt, the opening two words of our parsha also contain a message on the level of *remez* (allusion). The Gemara<sup>2</sup> states that a person is obligated to review the weekly parsha reading the verses twice and then translating them – “שנים מקרא ואחד תרגום”. The commentators point out that this mitzvah is alluded to in the words “וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת”, which are an acronym for “וְחַיִּיב אָדָם לְעִבּוֹר הַפְּרָשָׁה שְׁנַיִם מִקְרָא וְאֶחָד תְּרַגְּמוֹ” – *A person is obligated to review the parsha, twice with scripture and once with targum.* It is most interesting to ponder this particular choice of location through which to allude to this mitzvah. How is it connected to the Jewish people coming to Mitzrayim?

The onset of the persecution of the Jewish people is recorded in verses 6-8:

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל אָחָיו וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא. וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ... וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם. וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ  
 קָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף.

*Yosef died, and all his brothers, and that entire generation. And the Bnei Yisrael multiplied profusely... and the land was filled with them. And a new king arose over Mitzrayim, who did not know of Yosef.*

The Chasam Sofer explains that the relationship between these verses is not just *sequential*, it is *causational*. After all, we note that Yaakov's family had been in Mitzrayim for a number of decades

1 Shemos 1:1.

2 Berachos 8b.

without experiencing any oppression. What brought on such a drastic change? The Sages comment<sup>3</sup> that the phrase “*and the land was filled with them*” in verse 7 is stated in a negative light. With the death of Yosef and his generation, the people lost their connection with the distinct outlook and values embodied by their forbears and began to try and integrate and insinuate themselves into Egyptian culture. The result was that “the land was filled with them,” including places which were neither appropriate for them nor in keeping with the values they were meant to uphold. The result of this tragically misguided move is recorded in verse 8: “*And a new king arose over Mitzrayim who did not know of Yosef,*” bringing on oppressive edicts for them, and ultimately leading to their enslavement and persecution.

What led to the people’s abandonment of the ways of their fathers? The answer is that although they were well aware of the way the earlier generations had lived, and no doubt appreciated its value, they could not see how this could be applied to their new surroundings. It may have been appropriate for “The Heim” of Canaan, but not for modern Egypt. Confronted with the perceived conflict between an ancient way of life and the need to adapt to a new society, they chose the latter.

What is the solution to their quandary? The answer is: *Shnaim Mikra ve’Echad Targum!* Wherever the Jewish people are, they need to read the Torah – and then they need to read it again. Success begins by fully absorbing the Torah’s message and values. Once that has been accomplished, the next stage is “Targum” – to know how to translate the Torah’s timeless values into their current situation, in a way that will be both faithful to the former and yet compatible with the latter. This is the message of *Shnaim Mikra ve’Echad Targum*; it is, quite literally, a message for all times.<sup>4</sup>



## **PART II: FOUND IN CONFRONTATION**

Ultimately, surviving the exile and paving the way toward redemption involves being faithful, not only to a way of life, but to our very identity. The Torah tells of how, in the course of surveying the tribulations of his brethren, Moshe came upon an Egyptian taskmaster beating a Hebrew slave. The verse states:

וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיִּרְא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּה אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל

*He looked this way, and that way, and saw that there was no one, and he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.*<sup>5</sup>

The simple meaning of the verse is that Moshe first checked that there was no one there who might report him to Pharaoh, and then proceeded to take action against the Egyptian.

One of the great Chassidic masters interpreted the verse as follows. Moshe was of Hebrew descent, and yet grew up in an Egyptian palace. He was inclined to see himself as being a composite person with an integrated identity, i.e., a “Hebrew-Egyptian.” However, this way of defining himself became untenable on that day when he saw the two sides of himself in irreconcilable conflict: an Egyptian beating a Hebrew.

3 Midrash Shemos Rabbah.

4 R’ Ze’ev Freund, *Shabbos u’Moadim*.

5 Shemos 2:12.

What was Moshe to do? It was impossible to look upon this scene and respond appropriately as a Hebrew-Egyptian, for there was no course of action which would not pit one side of himself against the other. In this defining moment, Moshe had to decide he really was. Thus the verse says:

*"He looked this way and that way"* – Moshe looked at one side of himself and saw a Hebrew, and the other side of himself and saw an Egyptian.

*"And he saw that there was no one"* — Moshe saw that the person he thought he was doesn't really exist! He now realizes that he cannot be both. He will have to choose.

*"And he slew the Egyptian and buried him in the dust."* – Moshe killed the Egyptian inside of him, for he realized that although he had been brought up in Egypt, that was not who he was. He was a Hebrew.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Heard from Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, zt"l.