

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## PARSHAS VAEIRA

### Four Redemptions inside One Exodus

לְכֹן אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה' וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעַבְדֵיהֶם וְגִאֲלֹתִי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָה וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים. וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהִיִּיתִי לְכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְיָדַעְתֶּם כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם הַמּוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סְבִלֹת מִצְרַיִם.

*Therefore, say to the Bnei Yisrael, “I am Hashem, and I shall take you out from under the burdens of Mitzrayim, and I shall rescue you from their service, and I shall redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I shall take you to Me as a people and I shall be a God to you; and you shall know that I am Hashem your God, Who takes you out from under the burdens of Mitzrayim.”<sup>1</sup>*

These two verses, stated by Hashem to Moshe at the beginning of our parsha, contain what are known as “the four expressions of redemption.” However, as many commentators point out, this depiction does not do full justice to these terms, as “four expressions” of something sounds like four ways of saying the same things. In reality, these four terms represent four distinct stages in the redemption from Mitzrayim; and indeed, the Talmud Yerushalmi thus refers to them as “Four Redemptions”.

#### RAV HIRSCH: A SYSTEMATIC REVERSAL OF THE EGYPTIAN EXILE

There have been many different interpretations of these four stages offered by the commentators over the generations, both in the Rishonim and the Acharonim.<sup>2</sup> A classic approach to this matter is found in the commentary of Rav Hirsch, who explains that if we wish to understand the specific connotation of each of these “redemption terms,” we must remind ourselves of the way the Torah itself originally described this exile...

In Parshas Lech Lecha, Avraham is foretold of the exile that his descendants will experience:

וַיֹּאמֶר לְאַבְרָם יָדַע תְּדַע כִּי גֵר יִהְיֶה זְרַעְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ לֹא לָהֶם וְעַבְדוּם וְעָנּוּ אֹתָם אַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה.

*[Hashem] said to Avram, “You shall surely know that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and they will serve them, and they will oppress them, for four hundred years.”*

<sup>1</sup> Shemos 6:6-7.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. commentaries of Rabbeinu Bachye, Abarbanel, Malbim and Netziv, among others.

We see that the exile is described as comprising three increasing levels: 1) being strangers in a foreign land, 2) serving the Egyptians 3) being oppressed by them. As such, the redemption from that exile will likewise take the form of undoing those levels, beginning, of course, with the most difficult:

- ▷ וְהוֹצֵאתִי – “I will take you out from the burdens of Mitzrayim,” refers to releasing them from the burden of oppression.
- ▷ וְהִצַּלְתִּי – “I will save you from their service,” refers to freeing them from having to serve the Egyptians.
- ▷ וְגָאֵלְתִּי – “I will redeem you,” refers to the indignity of being aliens in a foreign land, with no status, standing or recognition.

It is most interesting to note that, in contrast with the first two expressions which specify *from what* the people will be redeemed (“the burdens... their service”), this third expression instead focuses on *how* – “with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.” This addresses one of the most basic questions regarding the entire Exodus from Egypt. Arguably, the whole process could have taken place on a much lower key, with Pharaoh being afflicted with some debilitating condition until the people were released and a safe distance away. Instead, it was a year-long production, full of miracles and wonders, as well as devastating and humiliating judgments for the Egyptians. A crucial goal served by this method is that it *restored the prestige of the Jewish people*. After having been regarded as people of no worth from the time they entered the land, Hashem demonstrated that in His eyes they were of *immense* value, deserving of great miracles through which their oppressors would be punished. This was the final point of their redemption, leading to the fourth stage:

וְלִקְחֹתִי – “I will take you to Me as a people,” expresses the purpose of the entire Egyptian experience – to enable the Jewish people to receive the Torah.

#### BETWEEN סבלות AND סבלות – OPPRESSION AND RECOGNITION

Having discussed the four stages of redemption in a general sense, let us consider for a moment a fascinating detail within these verses. The word “*sivlos*” – burdens appears twice: first in the beginning of verse 6 and then again at the end of verse 7. However, there is a difference between these two. The first time it is written it is missing the letter *vav* at the end – “סבלות”, while the second time it is written “in full,” with the *vav* – “סבלות”. What is behind this shift?

R’ Yosef Salant offers a most profound explanation.<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the midrash and classic commentators that the damage sustained by the Jewish people in Egypt was twofold in nature; for alongside the physical and material oppression of the slavery itself, there was also a spiritual decline. This is summed up in the statement of the Zohar that by the time they left, the people were on the forty-ninth level of impurity.<sup>4</sup> Whether this damage was inflicted knowingly and intentionally by the Egyptians or was simply a by-product of the general Egypt experience is a matter of some discussion among the commentators,<sup>5</sup> but the damage was there. The corollary of this idea is that redemption from Egypt in the full sense of the word incorporated a spiritual rehabilitation as well as physical deliverance.

It is the nature of things that if a person has a problem of a physical nature, be it medical, economic, or

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3 Be'er Yosef, Parshas Va'eira.

4 One of the major questions regarding this matter is understanding how the subjugation in Egypt can on the one hand have inflicted such massive spiritual damage on the Jewish people, while on the other hand, the entire experience was preparing them to be able to receive the Torah! It would appear that one needs to differentiate between the reconstruction that was taking place on a *core* level and the negative fallout that accrued on a *behavioral* level.

5 See e.g. Beis Halevi Parshas Shemos.

otherwise, that person will be aware of the fact. By contrast, if a person has a spiritual problem, they might not be aware of it at all. Indeed, it is practically a trademark of spiritual problems that a person becomes desensitized to spiritual matters, including their own spiritual situation. Ironically, therefore, sometimes it is only after a person has been able to recover to a certain degree that they are able to look back and realize they initially had a problem.

The commentators explain that when a plural word is spelled without a vav at the end, it is in order to denote an element of singularity as well. This brings us to the spelling of the word “sivlos”. As we noted the first time it appears, when Hashem says, “I will take you out from under the burdens of Egypt,” the word is written without a vav – “סִבְלוֹת”. The reason is because at the time they were being rescued, the people were only aware of being under one type of burden, namely, the physical oppression. However, the next verse states that once Hashem has taken the people to Him as His people, culminating in the giving of the Torah, then they will be able to look back from their spiritually recovered state and realize that Hashem had taken them out from both types of oppression, both physical and spiritual – hence the word “סִבְלוֹת” is written with a vav!

It is both fascinating and moving to see how the Torah communicates such a profound idea by simply removing one letter from one of its words.

#### FROM FOUR STAGES TO FOUR REDEMPTIONS

Taking this discussion one stage further, the Shem Mishmuel adds an entirely new dimension to our understanding of the “four redemptions” in our verses. As we know, beyond the exile in Egypt, the Jewish people have undergone four exiles in their history: 1) Babylon, 2) Persia and Media, 3) Greece and 4) Edom or Rome, with the latter continuing until the coming of the Mashiach. Moreover, the exile in Egypt is seen as the root exile experience, of which the subsequent four exiles are all considered branches. This idea is contained in the verse which describes the Jewish people’s arrival in Egypt: “וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם – *And these are the names of the Children of Israel, who were coming to Egypt.*” We note that the form used is not “אֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ – *who came,*” but rather, “הַבָּאִים”. The letters of the word בָּאִים correspond to the four subsequent “branch” exiles:

- ▷ ב – Bavel (Babylon)
- ▷ א – Edom (Rome)
- ▷ י – Yavan (Greece)
- ▷ מ – Madai (Persia)

In this regard, not only did the exile in Egypt constitute the root of the four exiles, but the Exodus from there likewise represents the root redemption experience, of which all subsequent redemptions are branches. With this in mind, let us return to the “four redemptions” in our parsha and we will see that they correspond to the redemption from the four later exiles:

- ▷ The first exile involved the Jewish people being physically exiled from their land to Babylon. As such, the redemption from that exile was removing them from that land back to the Land of Israel. Hence, the key term regarding that redemption is, “וְהוֹצֵאתִי – *I will take them out.*”
- ▷ The second exile was that of Persia, where the Jewish people faced the threat of extinction at the hands of Haman. Hence the redemption from that exile was being saved from that decree, so that the key term for that redemption is, “וְהִצַּלְתִּי – *I will save them.*”
- ▷ The third exile was that of Greece, which took place in the land of Israel. The goal of the Greeks was not to exterminate the Jewish people, but to shift their allegiance from Hashem

to the Greek outlook. The redemption from that exile took the form of re-affirming the Jewish people's relationship with Hashem. The concept of *geulah* in Torah denotes restoring something to its rightful owner.<sup>6</sup> Hence, the term which reflects that redemption is, “וְגֵאַלְתִּי – *I will redeem.*”

- ▷ The fourth and final exile of Rome will complete the tribulations that the Jewish people need to experience in their history in order to fully realize their destiny and connect with Hashem as His people. Hence, the fourth term of redemption is “וְלָקַחְתִּי – *I will take you to Me as a people.*”

Stunning!

It is most interesting to note in this regard that the four redemption terms are not divided equally as two in each verse; rather, the first verse contains three while the second verse contains the fourth. This parallels the statement of the Midrash<sup>7</sup> regarding the four exiles, which states that when Daniel had his visions of the four exiles,<sup>8</sup> he dreamt about the first three on one night and the fourth on the next night; to teach you, says the Midrash, that the fourth exile is equal to all the first three.

#### POSTSCRIPT: FOUR THAT ARE FIVE

Throughout the discussion of the “four terms of redemption,” it is important not to lose sight of the fifth, which describes where the previous four stages will lead us to, “וְהֵבֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם אֶל הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁאַתִּי אֶת יָדִי, לְתֵת אֶתְהָ לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק וְלְיַעֲקֹב וְנָתַתִּי אֶתְהָ לְכֶם מִרְשָׁה אֲנִי יְיָ – *And I shall bring you to the land about which I raised My hand [in an oath] to give it to Avraham. Yitzchak and Yaakov, and I shall give it to you as a heritage, I am Hashem.*”<sup>9</sup>

May we merit to see the fulfillment of all these stages and elements of redemption, speedily in our days!

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6 See e.g. Vayikra 27:13.

7 Vayikra Rabbah, Parshas Shemini.

8 Described in Daniel Chap. 7.

9 Verse 8.