

# PARSHAS SHEMOS

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

There are four reasons for the distinctiveness of Shmot and the separation between it and the first book of the Torah, Bereshit:

- 1.** Bereshit contains the stories of great and righteous individuals, whereas the book of Shmot, as well as the following three books, is the story of the Jewish Nation. In the first book we are told of the actions of great spiritual people from Adam to Noach, Shem, Ever, Avraham, Yitzhak, and Yaacov, and their sons. It is perhaps pertinent to point out that of these individuals, all those coming before Avraham were not Jewish, and so were not part of the intrinsic Jewish heritage. The movement to the second book, therefore, actually the movement from the specific knowledge of universal monotheism which all of those preceding Avraham had, [just as all individuals are capable of having], and the creation of the Avrahamic nation. The book of Shmot, therefore, deals with the exile of Israel in Egypt, their redemption, the granting of the Torah and the building of the Mishkan so that G-d would rest in the midst of this Avrahamic Nation.
- 2.** Before describing the story of the Avrahamic Israelite Nation, the Torah wanted to tell us that this people were not the result of the accidental migration of different tribes or the integration of individuals, either through conquest or conversion, into a national group. So too, the national group was not the result of some gradual spiritual grouping, nor the result of outreach to disciples, but the destiny of the genealogy of a family. The Book of Bereshit comes to tell us the yichus of this Nation, describing its being descended from holy stock: Adam, thru Shet but not through Cain or Hevel, both of whom had spiritual shortcomings. Then, down through the son of Noach; Shem but not through Japhet or Cham, even though they too were the sons of Noach, the saint who was saved when the rest of humanity was destroyed. From the sons of Shem the family tree descends through Ever until Avraham was born to this spiritual aristocracy. However, the Israelite Nation proceeds not through all the sons of Avraham but only through Yitzhak, the selected one; neither through all the sons of Yitzhak but only through the descendants of his son Ya'akov. And here all the spiritual inheritance becomes resolved into his twelve sons, from which spring this Israelite Nation, even as Rabbi Yehudah Ha Levi explains in his book The Kuzari.
- 3.** Bereshit is that is the book of our Avot, tells the story of Creation and all the generations thereafter, in a total of 12 parshiot. The ten generations from Adam down to Noach occupy only one parsha. So too, the ten generations from Noach are included in a second single parsha, as all these generations were only a preparation for the emergence of the Avot. And then Bereshit is divided,

telling the story of the Avot: three parshiot to Avraham, one parsha to Yitzhak, three parshiot to Yaacov because he is the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, and then come three parshiot devoted to the story of the tribes themselves. Like Bereshit, the book of Shmot also has twelve chapters, but those twelve chapters are devoted to the actions of Moshe. So Sefer Bereshit with its twelve parshiot is The Book of The Avot, while the book of Shmot is The Book of Moshe, who is considered by the mystics to be the spiritual equivalent of all the Avot and the Shevatim.

**4.** The Book of Bereshit is, so to speak, the container of the reasons for the exile to Egypt and the Redemption that form the story of the Book of Shmot. So in Bereshit, we are taught of the selection of Avraham, G-d's command to him to leave his homeland and his fathers' house to go to Eretz Yisrael, the Promised Land, of the Brit Bein Habitarim. In that Brit, the Lord promised that Avraham's sons would inherit the land with its delineated boundaries, but that they would first be subject to servitude in a strange land, then be redeemed and brought back to the Land. So, we read of the actions of the sons of Ya'akov, the sale of Yosef and the resultant descent into Egypt in fulfillment of that covenant. The Book of Shmot is therefore the beginning of all the four books in the Torah in which the hero is actually the Jewish Nation - not individuals but rather the whole nation men, women, and children. The spiritual greatness and piety of the individuals mentioned in the Book of Bereshit, now finds its embodiment in the view of Judaism, in the religious life of a nation. The seventy souls with which Shmot begins were, so to speak, the foundation blocks on which this Nation, Mamechet Kohanim, was to be created. It is fascinating to find that this concept of a G-d intoxicated National grouping, as distinct from the pious and spiritualized individuals of other religions, is the main thrust of the thoughts of Yehudah Ha Levi, Ramban, S.R. Hirsch, and HaRav Kook despite the centuries that separate them.]

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