

IT'S ALL IN YOUR MIND

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Hamaayan / The Torah Spring
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Shemos

Volume XIV, No. 13
23 Tevet 5760
January 1, 2000

Today's Learning:

Shabbat 9:5-6

Orach Chaim 216:13-217:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 32

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Ketubot 66

In this week's parashah, we read of Bnei Yisrael's enslavement in Egypt and of the beginning of their redemption. R' Yehoshua Heschel Rabinowitz z"l (1860-1938; the "Manostricher Rebbe" in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn) writes:

The exile in Egypt was twofold. Besides the physical exile in which the Jews were enslaved with bricks and mortar, the Jews' spirits were not able to develop. This spiritual exile was itself twofold. There was the exile of the da'at/knowledge and the exile of the midot/character traits.

The exile of the da'at came from their being "slaves to Pharaoh" (in the words of the Haggadah). Pharaoh himself said (5:2), "I do not know Hashem." [Therefore, Bnei Yisrael too did not know Hashem.] When a king is small-minded, his people will be too, for the king is to his nation as the

head is to the body. This is what King Shlomo meant when he wrote (Kohelet 10:16), "Woe to you, a land whose king acts as an adolescent."

The exile of the midot relates to the degeneration of the Jewish people's own character. This came from the fact that the land of Egypt is itself an impure place which is called (Bereishit 42:9), "The nakedness of the land." The Torah similarly introduces the prohibition on incest with the words (Vayikra 18:3): "Do not perform the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled." It does not say, do not perform the practices of those who dwell in the land, but rather, the practice of the land itself. The land itself is impure. One can see how deeply the land of Egypt negatively influenced Bnei Yisrael in their complaints in the desert that they missed the food of Egypt. [Imagine, after all the suffering that Jews endured in Egypt, they missed its food!]

(Do not ask, writes R' Rabinowitz, that the same verse in Vayikra says, "Do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan." He explains that the immorality of the Canaanites turned Canaan into a "sick" land, but it could be, and was, cured, when Bnei Yisrael settled there and kept the Torah.) (Haggadah Shel Pesach Torat Yehoshua p. 27)

"And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who were coming to Egypt; with Yaakov, each man and his household came." (1:1)

R' Baruch Yosef Sack z"l writes: Various midrashim list different meritorious practices that enabled Bnei Yisrael to be redeemed from Egypt. These are:

- They did not give up their Jewish names;
- They did not change their language;
- They did not commit adultery;
- They were not talebearers;
- They observed Shabbat; and
- They circumcised themselves [- at least the tribe of Levi did].

All of these are alluded to in our verse, as follows:

"These are the names of the children of Yisrael" - they kept their names. If they kept their names, they must have kept their language, for those who abandon the Jewish tongue usually abandon their Jewish names as well.

The gematria of "v'eleh shemot"/"And these are the names of" (788), plus eight, for the eight letters of the two words, equals 796. The gematria of "Shabbat, milah" (787), plus nine, for the seven letters and two words, also equals 796. Also, the words, "with Yaakov," allude to Shabbat and milah because the name of Yaakov is tied to those two mitzvot. Specifically, we say in shacharit of

Shabbat: "And in its contentment the uncircumcised shall not abide - for to Yisrael, Your people, have You given it in love, to the seed of Yaakov . . ."

Finally, the words "each man and his household" alludes to the fact that husband and wife were faithful to each other and did not commit adultery.

[R' Sack does not explain how the verse alludes to the fact that they were not talebearers. Perhaps this also is alluded to in the words "each man and his household," i.e., that they remained a close-knit family.] (Birkat Yosef)

R' Moshe Feinstein z"l was asked: If keeping Jewish names can bring about the redemption, why do we find that so many sages of the Talmud had non-Jewish names? He answered:

Perhaps our Sages' praise of Bnei Yisrael for maintaining Jewish names only refers to before the giving of the Torah, as then there was no other way to distinguish Bnei Yisrael from gentiles. This is especially true because many of Bnei Yisrael in Egypt were idolators and did not circumcise themselves. (Only the tribe of Levi was careful to circumcise its sons.)

For that generation, preserving Jewish names and the Hebrew language were signs that they believed in the redemption. Accordingly, they deserved to be redeemed. Once the Torah was given, however, all that is expected of us is to keep the Torah; even our feelings and ethics are dictated by the Torah, as we learn in Pirkei Avot. The Torah does not expect us to look for other ways of identifying such as giving only Jewish names.

R' Feinstein concludes: Even though this appears logical to me, I am afraid to say it for certain. (Igrot Moshe: Orach Chaim IV No. 66)

"The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives . . . 'When you deliver the Hebrew women, . . . if it is a son, you are to kill him.'"

(1:15-16)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) observed: The method employed by the haters of Israel throughout the generations has been not only to oppress the Jew but also to discredit or dehumanize him in the eyes of the world. They have wanted to prove that he is a subhuman, an immoral being, and therefore does not deserve the sympathy of other people.

This was exactly the method employed by Pharaoh. He wanted to show that Bnei Yisrael were not worthy of sympathy in that the Hebrew midwives themselves had no sympathy for the newborn babies. Pharaoh wanted to show that the midwives were willing to kill the babies at birth in order to save themselves from punishment. (Quoted in The Rav, Section 18.06)

"During those many days, it happened that the king of Egypt died, and Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work and they cried out. Their outcry because of the work went up to G-d." (2:23)

R' Yaakov David Willowsky z"l observes: The seemingly redundant language, "Bnei Yisrael groaned because of the work and they cried out," means: They groaned because of the work and they cried out because of the Egyptian taskmasters who oppressed them. Significantly, only their cries that were because of the work went up to G-d; their cries that were because of their Egyptian taskmasters do not seem to have been answered.

Why? It is always proper to call out to G-d to save yourself from your own suffering. However, Chazal teach that if the oppressed calls upon G-d to judge his oppressor, G-d will judge the oppressed first.

We read later (3:7): "I have indeed seen the affliction of My people that is in Egypt and I have heard its outcry because of its taskmasters, for I have known of its sufferings." Does this verse not appear to contradict the lesson stated above? R' Willowsky explains that it is to answer this question that Hashem concluded, "for I have known of its suffering." This means: It is true that one is not supposed to complain about his oppressor, only about the oppression, but I have seen how great their suffering is and I know that the fact that they complained against their taskmasters is involuntary. Therefore the Torah continues, emphasizing (3:9): "And now, behold! The outcry of Bnei Yisrael has come to Me." Although they cried out against their oppressors, I view it as if they cried out for themselves alone.

(Nimukei Ridvaz)

Rabbis of the New World

This week, we begin a new feature in Hamaayan, highlighting rabbis and roshei yeshiva who served North American Jewry before World War II. Some of the sages that we will present are well known; most prominently, perhaps, R' Moshe Feinstein and R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Many more, however, are all but forgotten.

The following are biographical notes on two of the sages who appear in this week's issue:

R' Baruch Yosef Sack z"l was born in Krasilov, Volhynia (northeastern Ukraine) in 1887. His father was the chassidic rebbe of Krasilov, a part of the Zlotchover dynasty.

In 1913, R' Sack settled in Eretz Yisrael, where he hoped to establish an agricultural settlement. However, when World War I broke out, he was deported to Egypt.

Eventually, R' Sack reached the United States, where he became the leader of the Kobriners chassidim. The shul that he founded in New York was called "Degel Machaneh Yisrael."

Birkat Yosef, R' Sack's work that is quoted in this issue, was published in New York in 1919. He also

left other works. He died in New York on 16 Sivan 5709/1949. (Source: Encyclopedia Le'chassidut p. 390)

R' Yaakov David Willowsky z"l ("Ridvaz") was born in Kobrin in 1845. He served as rabbi in Vilna, Slutsk and other Lithuanian and White Russian towns, and also led yeshivot in several cities. In particular, Ridvaz encouraged the study of the Talmud Yerushalmi, and he authored several commentaries on that Talmud.

In 1902, Ridvaz emigrated to the United States with the hope of raising the religious standards of American Jewry. At a rabbinical convention in Philadelphia, Ridvaz was recognized as the "Elder Rabbi" in the United States. In 1904, he accepted a position in Chicago; however, he quickly became disillusioned, and, in 1905, he resettled in Tzefat, in Palestine. He died there on Rosh Hashanah 5674/1913.

In the introduction to one of his works, Ridvaz writes of himself: "All of my days I was a great zealot. When I saw that the pillars of Judaism were weakening, I could not restrain myself and I fought zealously with all my might." He was known as a powerful speaker who usually brought his audiences to tears of repentance. When he was asked why the audience in a certain town (known for its inhospitability to Torah) failed to respond to his words, he replied, "The job of a darshan/public speaker is to find the right key to open the faucet of tears for the audience. If I opened the faucet, but the reservoir was empty, that is not my fault."

Ridvaz's Torah commentary, quoted on page 3, was published in Chicago in 1904. (Source: Gedolei Ha'dorot p. 932)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
