

THE SECRET TO SURVIVING GALUS / YOU NEVER KNOW!

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: CD #1015 Ma'avir Sedrah – Why? When? Good Shabbos!

The Secret to Surviving Galus is Hidden in the Opening Pesukim of Sefer Shemos

Sefer Shemos begins with the *pasuk*, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel who came down to Egypt with Yaakov, each man and his household came." [Shemos 1:1] The Tolner Rebbe *shlit"a* asks three interesting questions on this *pasuk*:

First, the five opening pesukim of *Sefer Shemos* appear to be redundant. The Torah lists the names of the twelve tribes; it says that the population of Yaakov's family totaled seventy; and that Yosef was already in Egypt. We knew all this already from the end of *Sefer Bereishis*! Parshas Vayigash contains an enumeration not only of Yaakov's children, but of all his grandchildren as well. The Torah says that the total population of Yaakov's descendants in Egypt was seventy. We know the Torah is very judicious in its use of words, so why was this census information repeated here?

Second, it would seem that the more precise way to introduce the sefer would be to say "And these are the Children of Israel who came down to Egypt..." Why is emphasis placed on the names of the Children of Israel?

Third, why does the Torah use the term "*ha'baim Mitzrayema*" to express the idea "who came down to Egypt," when grammatically speaking, the word "*ha'baim*" is present tense, and the expression would usually be translated "who are coming (down to Egypt)?" Why does the Torah not say "*she'ba-oo Mitzrayema*," which is past tense?

These are the three questions the Tolner Rebbe *shlit"a* asks. He gives the following analysis, which answers these questions:

A famous saying of *Chazal* teaches that in the merit of the fact that the Jews did not change their names, their language, and their mode of dress, they were redeemed from Egypt.

These first five pesukim of Sefer Shemos are not here to tell us history. They are not written to

inform us who came down to Egypt. As we mentioned before, we know that already. This opening section of the second book of *Chumash* is trying to teach us that this is the secret of how to exist in *Galus* [exile]. As Chazal say, the exile in Egypt and the redemption from that exile are the paradigms for all future exiles and redemptions of the Jewish people.

As we have mentioned many times, *Galus* is a function of the history of the Jewish people. We have been in *Galus* more years than we have been in *Eretz Yisrael*. The two *batei mikdash* [Temples] lasted approximately 400 years each; the period of the Judges was roughly another 400 years. Other than those approximately 1200 years, we have been in exile most of the time of our collective existence. We need a blueprint, a survival kit, with which to survive *Galus*.

That is why the opening *pasuk* of the *sefer* reiterates, "And these are the names of the Children of Israel." It is not to inform us who came down. The *pasuk* is telling us the secret of survival in *Galus*. The secret of maintaining our national identity in exile involves not changing our names. Yaakov's children did not adopt secular names or the names of the land. They were called by their Hebrew names, the names they were given at birth, not by the Egyptian equivalent of those names.

As we read in the *Hagaddah*, "... this teaches that they were distinct there" (*melamed she'hayu metzuyanim sham*). The only way a few dozen people can survive amongst a population of millions is by maintaining their unique identity. In those days, maintaining a nation's national identity meant not changing their names, not changing their language, and not changing their clothes.

Currently, we have 613 mitzvos which allow us to maintain our unique Jewish identity. But this was before *matan Torah*. They did not have a set of hundreds of unique commandments. What, then, made them "Jewish?" Today we are "Jewish" because we keep Shabbos, we keep Kashrus, we have Tallis, we have Tefillin -- we have all these things. But what made us "Jewish" in Egypt? The answer is that they had to "hang on by their fingernails" to whatever Jewish identity they had. A critical part of that Jewish identity was their names. Therefore, "These were the NAMES of the Children of Israel..." This is part of the secret.

Regarding the term "*ha'Baim Mitzrayema*" (in present tense), the Tolner Rebbe says: Of course, based on the rules of grammar, it should read "*she'Ba'oo Mitzrayema*" (past tense), but here too, the *pasuk* is not telling us history. It is teaching us a message. The Jews did not just come to Egypt and settle in. They were always in a state of flux. They knew, and kept reminding themselves, that they were "strangers in a land that did not belong to them." We are always "still in the process of just coming here." We are "greenhorns." We are going to remain "greenhorns," and we are proud that we are "greenhorns." We are always in the state of "*ha'baim*" -- just now coming to Egypt. We are here merely as travelers -- this is not our permanent country.

These are the "secrets" the Torah is revealing to us in the opening *pesukim* of *Sefer Shemos*. A person must not identify himself by saying, "I am an Egyptian Jew." He must say, "I am a Jew" (period!). If not, he is going to be swallowed up by the host culture.

There is one other secret mentioned in this opening *pasuk*. That is alluded to by the words "*ish u'beiso ba-oo*" (each man and his household came)." In situations when a nation is in turmoil -- they were after all in exile; they were foreigners in a strange land -- in such situations, it is the Jewish home that must become the bastion of serenity and protection in order that their national integrity be maintained.

When the outside environment is hostile, the sanctity of the Jewish home (*bayis ha'Yehudi*) becomes critical to the maintenance of Jewish identity. Our fortress is dependent upon the *bayis ha'Yehudi*. This is primarily based on how a woman maintains her home. Throughout our exile, it has been the "*Yiddishe shtub*" [the Jewish home] which has been the key to our survival.

These three things -- *Shemos* (maintain your Jewish identity), *ha'baim* (always be in a state of being a stranger in the land, not a sojourner), and *beiso* (the Jewish home) -- are the secrets of our survival in exile.

Four of the five books of the Torah end in a similar fashion -- ending either with reference to "*Bnei Yisrael*" or "*Kol Yisrael*". For instance, the Book of Vayikra ends "These are the commandments that Hashem commanded to the Children of Israel on Mount Sinai." [Vayikra 27:34] The Book of Bamidbar ends "These are the commandments and laws that Hashem commanded through Moshe to the Children of Israel in the Wilderness of Moab by the Jordan (near) Yericho [Bamidbar 36:13]. The Book of Devorim ends with the words "...before the eyes of all Israel. [Devorim 34:12]"

Sefer Shemos is unique in that it concludes with neither the expression "*Bnei Yisrael*" (as we find at the end of Bereishis, Vayikra, and Bamidbar) nor "*kol Yisrael*" (as we find at the end of Devorim). *Sefer Shemos* ends with the expression: "before the eyes of all the House of Israel..." (*kol Beis Yisrael*). This is the only one of the *Chamisha Chumshei Torah* that ends like that, and in fact, this is exactly how *Sefer Shemos* began -- *ish u'Beiso ba'oo* (every man and his household came). The secret of their survival in exile was *beis Yisrael* -- the Jewish household. That was the island of tranquility in a sea of turmoil.

Other than Moshe Rabbeinu, You Never Know!

After Moshe sees an Egyptian beating a Jew, the *pasuk* says, "and he looked this way and that, and he saw that there was no man, and he smote the Egyptian and he buried him in the sand." [Shemos: 2:12] Moshe Rabbeinu killed the Egyptian who was beating the Jew. Rashi elaborates on the words "and he looked this way and that, and saw that there was no man": Moshe (prophetically) peered into the future and determined that no righteous person was destined to descend from this Egyptian.

The Brisker Rav (Rav Velvel -- Yitzchak Zev -- Soloveitchik [1886-1959]) asks the following question:

What difference does it make if a righteous person was destined to descend from this Egyptian? If the Egyptian was deserving of the death penalty for striking a Jew, then who cares if he will have righteous descendants? A Jewish court does not pardon the sins of ancestors based on the merits of future offspring. And if he was not deserving of the death penalty for his actions, we certainly would not execute him merely because he was not going to have a righteous descendant!

The Brisker Rav answers by citing the Rashi on *pasuk* 14: When Moshe Rabbeinu killed this Egyptian he executed him by using the *Shem HaMeforash* (the Ineffable Name of the Almighty). A person is normally prohibited from pronouncing this Name, but if he has those powers, he can literally kill someone by invoking the *Shem HaMeforash* against him. Why did Moshe utilize this method of execution?

The Brisker Rav explains by quoting a Rambam: "An idolater who smites an Israelite, even though he is deserving of death, is not executed." [Hilchos Milachim 10:6] This is a ruling we find in Tractate Sanhedrin [58b]: "Rav Chanina says, an idolater who strikes an Israelite is deserving of death, as it is written, 'and he turned this way and that and saw that there was no man and he smote the Egyptian'." However, the Rambam rules that although he is deserving of death, we do not execute him. The *Kesef Mishna* there explains that the Rambam means that the idolater receives the death penalty "at the Hand of Heaven." We do not prosecute him, but Hashem will take care of him.

Based on this *Kesef Mishna*, the Brisker Rav says that is why Moshe killed the Egyptian with the *Shem haMeforash*. Utilizing the Name of G-d to kill the Egyptian was a form of "execution by the Hand of Heaven."

The Brisker Rav explains that now we understand what Rashi means when he says that Moshe looked and saw that a righteous person would not descend from this person. In earthly courts, we certainly do not take into account who the future descendants of a person are when determining whether or not to punish him for a given crime. In "death at the Hand of Heaven," however, these are exactly the type of calculations the Almighty takes into account when determining if and when to carry out the punishment of "death at the Hand of Heaven."

In connection with this insight of the Brisker Rav, I would like to relate an interesting incident:

There was a brilliant young Yeshiva student in Lakewood who got married. The *Roshei Yeshiva* and many of the distinguished students of the Yeshiva came to his *Sheva Brochos*. The *chosson* said a nice *dvar Torah* during the meal. It was now the end of the *Sheva Brochos* meal, and the grandfather of the *chosson* asked for permission to speak.

The grandfather of the *chosson* was an *am ha'aretz* (opposite of a *talmid chochom*). He knew nothing. The *chosson* began squirming in his chair. "What is my grandfather going to say? The Rosh Yeshivas are all here. I am going to be so embarrassed!" But after all, he was the *Zeida*. It is not possible to tell a *Zeida* that he cannot speak at his grandson's *Sheva Brochos*.

The Zeida (who was from Europe) got up and spoke to the gathering:

I would like to relate an incident that happened in Europe. There was a young boy in Europe who attended *cheder*. He was a *chevremán* [a mischief maker]. One Monday morning, before anyone was in shul, this boy took a goat and put it into the *aron kodesh*. When it came time for *krias haTorah*, the *gabbai* opened the *aron kodesh* to take out a *Sefer Torah*. Lo and behold, a goat jumped out! The people in shul were outraged. They traced the criminal act back to this mischievous boy.

The principal of the *cheder* came to the boy's parents and said, "This is the last straw! This time your son has gone too far. We are throwing him out of the school." The boy then went to the town Rav and told him, "I want to take the principal to a *din Torah* and demand that he accepts me back into school." The principal came to the *din Torah*. The Rav turned to the boy and asked, "What is your claim?" The boy responded, "There is only one *cheder* in this town. If I get thrown out of this *cheder*, what will become of me? Either I will go to the *gymnasium* (secular educational institution) and lose all connection to Judaism, or I will wander the streets and lose all connection to Judaism, and then my children will not have any connection to Judaism. My grandchildren will not have any connection to Judaism! True, maybe I deserve to be thrown out of school. However, can you say that you have "looked this way and that way and saw that in the future no person will descend from me"? What is going to be with my descendants? What is going to be with my children and my grandchildren? This principal is sentencing them that they should all be irreligious Jews. That is not right! How can you sentence my children and grandchildren to a life without Torah?"

The principal said, "You are right," and he accepted the boy back into school.

The Zeida concluded, "Ani Yosef! I am that boy! I am that mischievous boy who put the goat in the *aron kodesh*. Now, look at my *ainekel* [grandson]. Look at this *illui* [brilliant prodigy]! See what happens! You never know who might come out from someone."

Moshe Rabbeinu had *ruach haKodesh*. He could say, "and he saw that there was no man (destined to emerge from him)." But the average person can never know. I have been in the Rebbe business long enough to know that this is indeed true. A prime rule of *chinuch* that teachers and educators must always bear in mind: "A person never knows!" A person never knows with his children, one never knows with his *talmidim* [students], one never knows with his classmates and peers. That is why it is essential to always proceed with caution in all matters of discipline, and certainly in "life and death matters" such as expulsion.

Transcribed by David Twersky, Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com

Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman, Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A listing of the halachic portions for Parshas Shemos is provided below:

- # 038 - Husbands at Childbirth
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