



"Haba'im Mitzraymah" — A Linguistic Problem

So let's begin.

The Torah begins this new Sefer and it says: **אֶלָּא שָׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרַיָּה**.

And the famous question that's asked is: why in the world would we be talking about the Jewish people coming to Egypt, when actually they've been in Egypt at this point for decades?

The story is being narrated from the perspective of already after Yosef has passed away.

How long does Yosef rule for? Eighty years.

How long after Yosef begins his rule do the Jews come down to Egypt? Nine? Seventeen?

Well, remember this: he tells them to move to Egypt because there are how many more years left in the famine? Five more years.

So how many years has he been ruling? Remember: seven plus two is nine. So it's nine minus eighty, because he rules for eighty years as king in Egypt.

Alright? So that's a long time.

A Generational Perspective

Now just to put that in perspective: I know there's the one or two in every crowd that will say, "My parents, my grandparents, my great-grandparents were born here in America."

You have a few of them.

Could someone here raise their hand whose great-grandparents were born in America?

In this entire room, not one hand went up.

There are a lot of readers out there. Just give us a shout — wherever you read this shiur, on whatever outlet you heard the shiur on — if your great-great-grandparents were born in America.

The vast majority of people are people that would have come in the amount of time we're discussing.

And if you ask me, "What do you say you're from?" America.

Still Newcomers

The Torah is pointing out that although they've already been here for seventy-plus years, they are still *haba'im Mitzraymah*. They're still the ones that are coming to Egypt.

In fact, it is the Belzer Rebbe that pointed out that the Jewish people maintained — no matter how long they were in Egypt — they maintained that they were different, that they were apart, that they were not part of the culture of Egypt.

They were able to hold on to the feeling that we are not from here.

We are *haba'im*. We're the ones that have come.

A Contradiction Emerges

Let me quote a beautiful piece from the Shearit Menachem.

He asks: why is it that Parashat Vayechi is *stumah*, is closed?

Rashi explains: because the eyes of the Jewish people were closed, their hearts were closed. They started becoming more like the Egyptians. They started their slavery process now that Yaakov Avinu died.

So therefore, Parashat Vayechi is *stumah*. There's no space between the parashiyot.

Vayechi is lost in the jumble. There's no space between the parashiyot. You have to find it with the pointer, otherwise you can't find it, because it's right in the middle of a line.

So it's *stumah*. Why?

Because Yaakov Avinu passed away, and their eyes and their hearts were closed to the ways of their forefathers, and the *shibud*, the slavery, started.

The Shearit Menachem's Question

The question the Shearit Menachem asks is: by the time Vayechi begins, Yaakov Avinu is still alive.

You want to have a *stumah*, a parashah with no space? Then it should be after Vayechi, not before.

Not only that — in Vayechi they're not enslaved.

So the whole idea that Rashi is bringing should really be in the next parashah, in between Vayechi and Shemot.

And he answers a very interesting answer.

Vaye'achazu Bah — The Turning Point

He answers that the pasuk says, at the end, the last sentence of Parashat Vayigash, that the Jewish people were now in the land of Goshen, and the pasuk says *vaye'achazu bah* — they took hold of it — *vayifru* — and they became many, many Jews.

That's the last pasuk in Parashat Vayigash.

Say the commentators: what does it mean *vaye'achazu*?

Rashi says *achuzah*.

What is *achuzah*?

An *achuzah* is a portion — but specifically what kind of portion? A portion of real estate.

Achuzat kever we find, but we find *achuzah* all over with regards to land that you inherit to your children.

So *vaye'achazu bah* means: what happened to the Jews in Goshen?

They started buying Egyptian real estate.

And specifically Egyptian real estate for the purpose of giving it over as an *achuzah*, as inheritance to their children.

On that, says the Shearit Menachem, that's what Rashi is talking about when he says that their eyes and hearts had begun to close.

That's what it means when it says that Yaakov Avinu died — even though he was still alive — the teachings of Yaakov Avinu had already passed away.

You know why?

Because when he died, and they took him back to Israel to bury him, and the famine was no longer going on in Egypt — they stayed in Egypt.

That's what it means when it says that *Yaakov Avinu* died, even though he was still alive, the teachings of *Yaakov Avinu* had already passed away.

You know why? Because when he died and they took him back to Israel to bury him and the famine was no longer going on in Egypt, they stayed in Egypt.

That's where I have my *shul*. My **וּצְאֵי אֶתְתָּה וְהַבָּאִים מִצְרִים** the *shul* congregation, right? *Bnei Paroh*, it's unbelievable. So this is what we're looking at and therefore you say *Yaakov Avinu* had already started to die.

Yaakov and Yisrael — A Name That Shifts

Yaakov is referred to in the Torah interchangeably. Sometimes we talk about him and we call him Yaakov, and sometimes we call him Yisrael.

Now this is unique.

Avraham also gets a name change. He goes from Avram to Avraham. Sarah also gets a name change. In Mi Sheberach, we change the name from Sarai to Sarah.

But never after the name change do we refer to her again as Sarai.

You don't ever find Avram again after his name is changed to Avraham.

It is only with Yaakov that after his name is changed, we still use his old name.

The Chachamim say that when we talk about Yaakov as a person, as his self, we use the name Yaakov.

And whenever we're talking about Yaakov in the role as leader of a nation — not father of a family, but decisions he's making on behalf of the nation of Israel — then we find the word Yisrael.

My friends, Yaakov might have been alive.

In fact, one could even say, like the pasuk says, *Yaakov Avinu lo met*.

But the question is Yisrael.

His impact on the Jews, his leadership, it started to fade as they bought land in Egypt, as they felt that they were part of this culture, that we need to be here, that we're not going to leave this place.

That was the death of Yaakov.

That was the eyes and hearts of Am Yisrael closing.

And therefore, in between Vayigash and Vayechi it's stumah, not in between Vayechi and Shemot.

The Contradiction Returns

So I'm left with the problem.

On the one hand, we're hearing Sfas Emes teaching us that *vaye'achazu bah* — that they bought real estate, that they started to forget who they were, that this was their future, Egypt was their home.

And then you're telling me, in the first pasuk of Shemot, according to what the Belzer Rebbe is teaching us, *haba'im Mitzraymah* — they managed to hold on to the fact that they were newcomers.

Haba'im means they were coming. They were newcomers.

Seventy-one years? Yeah, I just got here.

"I'm not really sure how things work in this country where I'm from," yeah?

They maintained that feeling.

So which is it?

Were they at home here?

Or were they in galut here?

An Easy Answer — and Why It Fails

The easy answer is to switch the perspective of the word *haba'im*.

Haba'im Mitzraymah might not mean that the Jews felt like they had just come.

It might mean that the Egyptians felt that they had just come.

"These are the newcomers. They're taking over. So many of them."

They felt like the Jews were immigrants.

And the Jews did not feel like it.

That's an easy answer to the question.

Haba'im Mitzraymah is referring to the way the Egyptians saw them.

Someone tell me why you don't like this answer.

Because the Torah talks about us.

Why would the Torah be presenting the perspective of the Egyptians?

It would only make sense if there were two perspectives, and the Torah should be sharing ours — not some other nation's perspective.

What "Newcomers" Actually Means

And the answer to me, therefore, is something that I believe is very powerful.

In the end, as Shimshon Deutsch was muttering under his breath, the *heilige ruf* — what does it mean that they were newcomers?

**שלא שינו את שם שלא שינו את לשונם שלא
שינו את מלבושם**

They didn't change their names. They didn't change their language. They didn't change their clothing.

They still dressed like Jews dressed.

I don't even know what that means, by the way.

Back then, everybody's wearing robes.

I mean, I'm fairly certain that Yaakov Avinu was not wearing a Borsalino nor a shtreimel.

A shtreimel? Shepherd.

For sure not.

Living in the Middle East, they would've moved.

He would've passed away from the heat.

Dress, Identity, and Egypt

Understand, my friends, that they were dressed like people dressed.

What was their dress as opposed to the Egyptian dress?

So the answer might actually be hidden in the etchings in the caves in Egypt — in ancient hieroglyphics.

In those drawings, in those etchings, you find Egyptians not dressed in the standard of the Middle East — with robes and turbans — but actually dressed very scantily, with just something covering their private parts.

And that was not befitting for the modesty of the way the Jewish people would have dressed.

So the Jews maintained the dress of the ancient Middle East and did not take on the dress of the ancient Egyptians.

So they did not change their clothing.

They did not change their names.

Their names were not Imhotep.

It was Amen — no, their name was not Imhotep.

Their name was Yankel, Avraham, Reuven, Shimon.

I was thinking to myself, maybe on a powerful lesson, the Torah is telling you in the beginning of the story of Egypt:

אלֹהֶשְׁמֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל — these are the names of the children of Israel.

Reuven, Shimon, Levi.

It's not only telling you the names of the tribes.

It's telling you: these names — this was the canon of names that people were choosing for their sons.

Every kid was a Yisrael, Reuven, Shimon, Levi.

Not a Ramses.

Two Truths at Once

My friends, that's what *haba'im* means.

They maintained that they were newcomers in certain ways — in their dress, in their names, in their language.

That's what the Midrash tells us.

There's a different Midrash that adds a third or fourth thing.

However — and this, to me, is the point of all points — it's true that they maintained a Jewish identity in these things.

But the Shearit Menachem could also be correct in saying *vaye'achazu bah*.

They were still people who bought here.

We were newcomers — but we were still settled.

We may have just got here, but were we ready to leave here?

Was our future here?

It could simultaneously be true that we did not feel that we were of this place — but that we did feel that we could become of this place.

Ve'ya'aseh shalom between the Belzer Rebbe and the Shearit Menachem.

A Turning Toward Megillah

In Masechet Megillah, we learn that they ask:

Why is it that the Jewish people were deserving of being wiped out by Haman?

What did they do that there should be a decree in heaven that the Jewish people should be wiped out?

The Gemara answers:

מפני שנחנו מושיעת אחשveroש

Because they enjoyed the party of Ahashverosh.

The Question of Ahashverosh's Party

So if you look at that, you think to yourself, okay, alright, I get this. Hashem very much hates McDonald's.

He doesn't like that they ate non-kosher food.

They didn't have Baron Herzog there. They had Baron Shmerzhog. It's not kosher.

They had different —

But what we actually know is that the food was kosher.

And what we actually know is that the wine was also wine that was given to them that was kosher.

Vehash'tiyah kadat.

It was under the hechsher of Machzikei Hadass. It's a Belz hechsher.

Everything was *la'asot kirtzon ish v'ish* — everyone had exactly what they wanted.

So what was the problem that they were at this party?

They say maybe because Achashverosh asked Vashti to come not dressed properly.

She didn't come in the end.

It wasn't even there.

They took the mechitzah down, but she didn't come.

What's the reason?

Why are they punished so horribly?

Because they enjoyed the seudah of Achashverosh.

What's the problem?

So they came.

So what?

They intermingled.

Who Told Them to Go

I have a better question.

Our Chachamim tell us — you know who told the Jews not to go to the seudah?

Mordechai said don't go.

Di levayah fun di gantze Yidden vet aroysgeyn,
right?

He said you can't go.

It's a disaster.

Don't go.

You know who told the Jews to go?

Number one, Haman.

But in an ironic twist of fate, you know who else told them to go?

All — or follow the, watch, read my lips — America.

Right?

All of the sages.

Let me ask you a question.

What's the halachah if all the rabbis tell you something and one rabbi tells you something else?

Who do you follow?

The majority.

Acharei rabbim lehatot.

You follow the majority.

All the rabbis said we should go to the party.

Look, we can't start up with this guy Achashverosh.

The guy's nuts.

Pikuach nefesh.

Go to the party.

So the Jews now have all the sages against Mordechai.

Who should they have listened to?

The Chachamim.

So what did they do wrong?

How could you punish them for going to the seudah?

Enjoying vs. Attending

And the answer is: they weren't punished for going.

They were punished because *she'nehenu* — because they enjoyed it.

So what?

The rabbi told me not to go to the Knicks game.

I went to the Knicks game.

And then they won.

And then I enjoyed it.

What do you want from my life?

OG Anunoby was slamming.

The guy was flying out of nowhere.

Defensive Player of the Year.

You know, Jalen Brunson, right?

Hitting threes.

Falling off the court.

Unbelievable.

Had the best time.

It was great.

Nehenu.

What's the problem?

What's wrong with that?

Listen carefully.

Because this is beautiful.

The Kelim of the Beit HaMikdash

The answer is that at the seudah of Achashverosh, he whipped out what was called *vekelim mikelim shonim*.

Now, we don't do this, but the Ashkenazim do.

When they read the Megillah, they get to that part, the sing-song of the Megillah switches from the Megillah tune to the tune of Eichah.

Why?

Because *vekelim mikelim shonim*.

Because the old vessels that they pulled out at the seudah of Achashverosh were the vessels that they had taken from the Beit HaMikdash.

All of a sudden the Jews are sitting there, and someone says, "You know, it's getting dark. We've been partying all day."

So the lights are going down.

They do the clapper.

And all of a sudden the lights come on.

And what was the light coming out of?

The Menorah.

Someone's getting served a plate.

They're like, "Oh, this is the weirdest bowl ever."

It's the kli of the Shulchan, of the Lechem Hapanim.

They're serving a bread basket on the table.

The guy gets a bazich for his salt shaker.

It doesn't have salt and pepper.

It has salt and levonah.

He doesn't know what to do.

The kelim of the Beit HaMikdash are serving pieces on the table.

What Achashverosh Was Declaring

My friends, it's not that Achashverosh ran out of china.

He could have — he's the king of the world.

He has enough plates.

Why was he using the vessels of the Beit HaMikdash?

Because he and Haman made a cheshbon.

They figured out that the seventy years of galut were up.

And if God had not fulfilled His promise to bring them back to Eretz Yisrael, then that's it.

He abandoned them.

And if that's the case, all the vessels we've been saving in case God takes them back — well, I guess we can use them.

They're not going back.

So they use the vessels of the Beit HaMikdash to indicate:

"Jews, your dream of going back to Eretz Yisrael is dead."

"There is no more *v'techezena einainu b'shuuucha l'Tzion b'rachamim.*"

"You're not going back."

Why That Moment Was Fatal

Says the Gemara:

And you enjoyed that party?

You enjoyed them telling you that from now on Persia is your home?

That this is where you belong?

That you're just one of the nations?

How could you have enjoyed that?

In that moment, they became worthy of destruction.

Standing on the Oxygen Tube

I mentioned that sometimes a person is punished in this life not because they did something wrong.

You know the famous joke.

A guy's in a hospital bed.

They're not giving him much time.

He's got the oxygen tube flowing in.

His kids come close.

They want to hear the last words from their father.

The son leans in.

The father is motioning him closer.

"Dad, what are you trying to say?"

"I can't hear you. Louder!"

Finally the son puts his ear right by his mouth.

And he says:

"Get off my oxygen tube."

Sometimes a person is punished because they did something wrong.

But sometimes you're just standing on the oxygen tube.

You didn't do anything wrong.

It's not punishment.

It's reality.

Why We Should Not Exist

Am Yisrael's survival throughout the ages is nothing short of miraculous.

By any account, we should not be here.

We should have been wiped out in Egypt.

We should have disappeared after we were exiled to Bavel.

In the story of Sancheriv mixing up the world, we should have disappeared.

With Nevuchadnezzar, we should have disappeared.

With Haman, we should have disappeared.

With the Greeks.

With the Romans.

With the Cossacks.

With the Nazis.

Every story should have meant the end of the Jewish people.

We should not exist.

No historian can explain the secret of our survival — except that God treats the Jewish people in a certain way.

Because they have to be alive.

They have to exist.

Existence Has a Condition

But my friends, they only have to exist if they are the Jewish people.

The minute we are not the Jewish people, it's not that we're punished and disappear.

What happens to us is what happens to every nation-state that is not on its own land.

They either assimilate into the host culture, or they're persecuted, or they're killed out of existence.

That's what happens to every other nation.

And if we are no different, then we are no different.

They deserved to be destroyed by Haman because they didn't actually exist as a nation if they didn't believe in a future.

A Universal Warning

My friends, it is possible to simultaneously consider yourself a Jewish people that's not from here and to believe that you have a future in whatever land you are listening to this from.

Anywhere you are in the world:

Understand:

We do not have a future here.

We don't.

The comment was: not as Jews.

Well, not as Jews, we don't have a future at all.

Celebrating the Erasure of the Future

But my friends, if we don't understand this — if we are not ensuring that we are not *nebeneh miseudato shel Achashverosh* — how many times did we inadvertently celebrate the fact, celebrate the fact, that our future was being erased?

Right now, the bedrock of this country is eroded to the point where it is the laws of this country — not a random guy on the street with a random stick — the laws of this country that are protecting the people who are persecuting us.

Just let that land for a minute.

Just this past week, the laws protecting a synagogue 100 feet from protesters were struck down.

The definition of antisemitism was struck down.

Understand what's happening around us — not by a hooligan on the street — but by a person in a suit, using the laws of the country.

If we could celebrate our identity here as Americans, we are done.

What the Problem Actually Is

I'm not saying we have to move.

The problem was not that the Jews were in Egypt.

The problem was that the Jewish people felt: *this is our future*.

So long as we're investing there in Israel.

So long as our eyes are there.

So long as our eyes are watching like hawks the growth of our yeshivot.

A Difficult but Necessary Statement

I'll tell you something which might be a little controversial.

But this is so important to understand.

We are living right now, in this moment, in a time where both the soldiers of Israel and the yeshiva boys of Israel are at war with the world.

They're wearing different uniforms.

But they are fighting the same battle — for the future of the Jewish people.

Make no mistake.

If we have people wearing uniforms, risking their lives to protect us, but we do not have any clear definition of who the "us" is that they are protecting — then there is no future of the Jewish people, and there is no future of the land of Israel.

Argue however much you want about the balance.

Argue however much you want about how and where.

But not understanding that Jewish identity is as much at risk as the Jewish body is at risk is simply not paying attention to what's going on in the world.

And you know what?

One needs bullets and guns and planes and tanks.

And the other just needs Instagram and TikTok.

What Happens When Identity Dissolves

If you go find your average kid in Israel who relates more with a non-Jewish kid here in America than he does with a religious kid next door to him in Israel — then we have nothing to protect.

And we are nothing in the future.

We've learned this lesson so many times.

But somehow, we keep forgetting it.

Figure it out, Israel.

Sit down at a table.

Work through it.

It doesn't matter how far apart you are.

We are brothers and sisters.

There has to be some answer.

There has to be some answer.

And there has to be an answer built into the fabric — into the future — of Am Yisrael.

Returning to "Haba'im"

May Hashem bless us that we should be zocheh to remember *haba'im*.

To remember where we're from.

And to remember who we are.

Derech Yisrael sava — the way of our parents and grandparents.

And may we, even as we settle in a place, recognize that we are not of this place.

Not so that we can't be good citizens.

We can be.

And we are amazing citizens of every country we go to.

We show respect.

And the law in Judaism is *dina d'malchuta dina* — the law of the land is binding.

We pray for the country every week.

Hanoten teshuah lamelachim.

We pray for the government of the country every week in shul.

A Unique Religious Reality

You tell me another religious denomination that does that.

You're not hearing that in a mosque.

You're not hearing it in a church.

In a shul — that's where you hear us praying for the members of the government and their cabinet.

You know how hard it is to pray for a mayor of this city and his cabinet?

And we're doing it anyway.

Because we have a deep and abiding sense of gratitude to the countries, to the cities, to the states that we live in.

But we also recognize that they are not us.

That we have different rules.

Different guidelines.

Different values.

And different months.

A Painful Example

January was just declared a celebration of Muslim culture.

And all the buildings were lit up green.

And if someone cannot see the irony — painful as it is — of lighting up the Twin Towers replacement in the color green, then you are just out of your mind.

If we could topple statues of every leader of the past because of insensitivity, then how do we not see and feel the sensitivity of the over three thousand people that died that day because of the radicalist agenda of that religion?

This is not to talk about your average everyday Muslim, or your average everyday adherent to Islam.

But to light its replacement with the colors of the radical version of that religion — when that's what it was — my friends, what are we doing?

Asking the Final Question

You want to call this home?

I don't recall us Jews having a month here
celebrating our contributions.

And not that we want it, by the way.

A normal city should not need to have months or
days celebrating every random person.

You shouldn't need it.

Because the beauty of this city is that it doesn't
matter to the city who you are or where you come
from.

Everyone's rights are respected.

Everyone's contributions are respected.

The minute you single out people, you have to ask
yourself:

Why are these people singled out?

What's going on?

The Closing

My friends, we just got here.

We will forever remain having just got here.

We will buy.

We will live.

We will settle.

But we will remember:

Hen am levadad yishkon, u'vagoyim lo yitchashav.

*Yehi ratzon imrei fi v'hegyon libi lefanecha, Hashem
tzuri v'go'ali.*

A Takeaway from the Lecture

The takeaway from this lecture is that it is possible
for a Jew to live in a place, to buy, to settle, to
contribute, to obey the law, to pray for the
government, to be a good citizen, and at the same
time to remember that this place is not who we are
and not where our future is.

The danger is not galut itself. The danger is when
galut becomes home.

The danger is not living among the nations. The
danger is enjoying the moment when the nations
tell us that our dream of returning, of being
distinct, of having a separate destiny, is over.

The Jewish people survive only when they
remember that they are *haba'im* — newcomers —
even after decades, even after generations.

The moment we forget that, the moment we feel
fully at home, history shows that reality eventually
reminds us — not as punishment, but as
consequence.

Five Shabbat Table Discussion Questions

1. **What is the difference between living responsibly in a country and believing that the country is our future?**
2. **How can a community tell whether it is “settled” or whether it has begun to**

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SPREADING LIGHT AND
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BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN
AM YISRAEL

feel “at home” in a way that is
spiritually dangerous?

3. Why was enjoying Achashverosh’s seudah considered more dangerous than merely attending it?
4. In what ways today might Jews unintentionally be celebrating the erasure of their future while believing they are simply being good citizens?
5. How do we balance gratitude to the countries we live in with the responsibility to preserve a distinct Jewish identity and destiny?

We Just Got Here — And We Must Never Forget It.

A Jew can buy here.

A Jew can live here.

A Jew can pray for the government
and obey the law.

But a Jew must never forget:
we are *haba'im* — the ones who just arrived.
Not yesterday.
Always.

Inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

Jewish Survival Depends on Jewish Identity.

The Jewish people do not survive
because they are strong.

They survive because they remain Jewish.

The moment we lose clarity about who “we” are,
there is nothing left to protect —
and nothing left worth protecting.

Inspired by the teachings of Rabbi Shlomo Farhi

You Can Attend the Party — But You Cannot Enjoy the Message.

The Jews were not punished for going to Achashverosh's feast.

They were punished for enjoying what it represented:
the declaration that their return was over,
that their destiny was erased,
that Persia was now home.



The Jews were not punished for going to Achashverosh's feast.
They were punished for enjoying what it represented:
the declaration that their return was over,
that their destiny was erased, that Persia was now home.

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Being Here Is Not the Problem. Calling It Home Is.

The danger of exile is not that we live among the nations.

The danger is the moment we begin to believe this is our future.
Jews can settle, build, succeed,
and contribute —
but the second we stop seeing ourselves as newcomers,
history reminds us who we are.

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