

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Shemot	29 Dec 2018	21 Tevet 5779	Exo. 1:1-6:1	Isa. 27:6-28:13; 29:22-23	Matt. 2:1-12

Last week, we ended the Sefer Beresheet with 2200 years of history. We start with the new *parashat* that is the beginning of slavery as well as the introduction of Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses the Teacher) until his death at the end of Sefer Devarim. At the end of the *parashat*, we find Moshe saying to Hashem, “YHWH, why have You done this evil to this people? Why is it that You have sent me?” (Exo. 5:22) Why is Moshe questioning Hashem and what we can learn from it. Until now, Abraham, Yitzchak, and Ya’akov did not question Hashem’s commands.

Hashem said to Abraham to take Yitzchak as a burnt offering. Abraham did not question Him. Hashem commanded Yitzchak not to go to Mitzrayim and he did not question Him. Hashem told Ya’akov not to be afraid to enter Mitzrayim, and he did not question Him. Even Yosef did not question Ya’akov when he sent him to check on his brothers. Yosef simply said, “Here I am,” meaning he was ready to obey his father’s command. Thus, the Book of Genesis is also known as the Book of Silence as the forefathers did not ask questions to situations Hashem created. They did not ask, “Why?” However, in this week’s *parashat*, we read Moshe questioning Hashem of His motive. The question we need to ask ourselves is when can we question Hashem or can we?

We need to reread previous chapters to understand what gave Moshe to complain against Hashem. When Moshe met Hashem for the first time in the burning bush and commanded him to go to Mitzrayim to have Yisraelites released from slavery, Moshe argued for five days (Exo. 3:11, 13, 4:1, 10, 13) before “the anger of YHWH burned against him” (Exo. 4:14). So, when Moshe asked, “Why is it that You have sent me?” (Exo. 5:22), he was not questioning Hashem, but pointing out as if saying, “See, I told you from the beginning I can’t do this thing You have commanded. And yet, You still sent me!”

In the beginning of Shemot, we see that a Pharaoh rose up who did not know Yosef and began to enslave the Yisraelites to harsh labor designed to break them physically as there were many of them. The Pharaoh was frightened that they might arise up against them if there was a war in Mitzrayim. The Midrash explains that at first, Pharaoh and his servants would dress up for hard work as if to say that they are all equal in labor. Then, as more Yisraelites joined the labor force, the Pharaoh began to back out slowly until only the Yisraelites remained. And the last 86 years of 210 years, the slavery started in full and it became worse. The labor was not only designed to debilitate the Yisraelites physically, but emotionally and spiritually as the Pharaoh forced them to sleep in the field, reversed the roles of labor between man and woman.

Then Moshe met Hashem in the burning bush and He convinces Moshe to go to Mitzrayim and release them from slavery. Moshe goes to the Pharaoh and said, “Let My people go, that they may hold a *moed* to Me in the wilderness.” (Exo. 5:1) The Pharaoh said, ““You make them rest from their burdens” (v. 5) from having too much rest to think about going out to the wilderness for their Elohim.” The situation got worse for the Yisraelites and the people threatened Moshe and Aharon.

The sages explain that Moshe fled from Mitzrayim for three months before returning and face Pharaoh with the ten plagues. They explain that Moshe came to Mitzrayim on the month of Iyar (Second month of biblical calendar) around the beginning of Shavuot. How do we know it was the month of Iyar? Because Pharaoh said, “Go get your straw wherever you can find it.” (v. 11) When do we cut straws? Just before summer begins. So, Moshe fled just before the cutting of straws during the month of Iyar. Now, we know the

Yisraelites left Mitzrayim in Nissan. We also know each plague lasted one month which started on Av (Fifth month of biblical calendar). On the month of Adar (Twelveth month of biblical calendar) was the plague of locusts. On the Rosh Chodesh of Nissan (First month of biblical calendar) was the plague of darkness. And on the fifteenth day of Nissan was the plague of Firstborn. Based on this calculation, we can conclude the plagues were total of nine months and Moshe returned on the month of Tammuz (Fourth month of biblical calendar) before the plagues started. Thus, Hashem said to Moshe, "Now shall you see what I will do to Pharaoh." (Exo. 6:1)

Now, returning to our *parashat*, Moshe is asking why His plans did not work. Moshe is not asking about himself, rather he was asking for the nation (Yisrael). Moshe's anguished plea set a tone for the rest of us. Meaning, if we are in a difficult or harsh situation, we should cry out to Hashem. We are not to accept such condition by saying, "Because Hashem wills it." Rather, we are to say, "Why are You doing this? Please show me what I did wrong so I can repent and remove my sins!"

By no means, we are not to complain against Hashem for all our situations as there are times when we should and we should not. The Hebrew word '*avadim*' is usually translated as 'slaves' but it also means 'servants'. As we are 'servants' of Hashem, there are situations we are to accept them as they are. But, as we look ourselves as His children, we are to ask questions, "Why?"

Back to our verse, Moshe asks two questions, "Why have You done this evil to this people? Why is it that You have sent me?" Moshe is addressing the first question to the Yisraelites. When he came to Mitzrayim first time, he told the people that Hashem sent him to bring them out of Mitzrayim from their harsh slavery. However, their situation worsened rather than getting better. The second question of Moshe implies, "I told You I am going to fail. So why did You send me?" This is a hint of how humble Moshe is. He is implying, "If you sent someone better than me than it would have all worked out. But me, who stutters, who is not eloquent with words, I am going to fail and You would be shamed. I am not fit for this job. But you sent me!" Thus Hashem said, "Now you will see."

The Rebbe from Alexander answers that Moshe could have said, "I am resigning" and be done with it. But Moshe stayed with the Yisraelites for 40 years in the wilderness. So, we see that Moshe is very dedicated and did all the work Hashem commanded him. He uses a parable to explain Moshe's situation. A secular man wanted to keep Pesach, but he did not know how to keep it. So, he sends his wife to his neighbor to see how they keep Pesach. His wife peeks through the neighbor's window and sees that their neighbor was arguing and it reaches to a point where the husband strikes his wife. Now, the secular man's wife sees this and says to herself, "This is how they keep the Pesach! I'd better not tell him about this." She returns home and her husband asks how their neighbor kept their Pesach. She says, "Oh, nothing unusual." Her husband thinking that she is keeping him from keeping Pesach gets angry and continues to badger her about Pesach. Finally, he got so upset, he hits her. Then she says, "I don't know why you sent me to our neighbor when you already know how to keep the Pesach." This was Moshe's second question to Hashem. He already knew he was going to fail, "but You sent me!"

The other Midrashim explains that Moshe did not stutter as said in Exodus 4:10, rather his mind was so elevated that his mind was not of this world. It uses an example of negotiation of sending a person who speaks well and knows the situation to conclude successful transaction. For these negotiators, they have to be well connected with their surroundings. Since, Moshe's spiritual level was so high, he was very distant from the reality of this world. For this reason, he was "slow in speech, and of a slow tongue." (v. 10)

Norman Elimelech said that when the situation came to Moshe personally, he would remain quiet. But when it came to the people, he did not hesitate to question Hashem. Such was the case in chapter 4. If we read carefully, we can learn that Moshe did not want the job Hashem gave. After all, he argued with Hashem for five days. But now, the situation has changed. The slavery was worse than before when Moshe stood in front of Pharaoh. Thus, he is now arguing with Hashem, not because the situation made him pitiful, but for the people whose labor was worsened. Therefore, we learn that Moshe was very humble from the beginning.

Now, to the beginning of this week's Torah portion, it begins with "And these are the names of the children of Yisrael who came into Mitzrayim with Ya'akov, every man came with his household." (Exo. 1:1) It is said in Daniel 12:3, "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and they that turn many to *tzedakah* (righteous) as the *cochavim le-olam-va-ed* (stars forever). The Zohar says that the "wise" are those who observe the secret of wisdom. And they "shall shine" means 'they will illuminate and sparkle with the shine of supernal *Chochmah*; and "as the brightness," means the brightness and sparkle of the river that emanates from Eden.'¹ "The firmament" is the stars and constellations, and all the candles that give lights which are all the lights that are in the worlds of Beri'ah (Creation), Yetzirah (Formation), and Asiyah (Action). The brightness of this firmament illuminates the garden which is the Malchut (Kingdom), and the Tree of Life which is the Tiferet (Beauty/Glory).

As we learned, there are 10 sefirot that is also called the "Tree of Life." It is a phrase also often used to refer to the Torah. Each represents one aspect of the Godhead; with a part of the body or aspects of human personality, a color, and one of the Names of Kadosh Barchu. The "Tree of Life" is surrounded by the external wild animal which represents external angels who find shelter in its shadow (the study of the Torah); the birds represent internal angels who sit under its branches (the observation of the Torah). The fruits are the souls that are born from it (the rewards in the World To Come).

The Midrash expounds on Exodus 1:1 by citing Proverbs 13:24 which says, "One who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him in his youth." The world teaches that if someone hits your son, you are to return the favor. So, what does it mean when it says, "One who spares his rod hates his son." It means that if a person withholds his son from discipline brings about that the son will ultimately follow the ways of the world, and the father will then hate him as a result.

The Midrash elaborates by citing the relationship between Abraham and Ishmael. When Ishmael was 15 years old, he began to bring idols home and began to worship as he saw the pagans' worship. Sarah saw this and tells Abraham to "drive him out lest my son learns from his evil ways." (Gen. 21:10) And it distressed Abraham that Ishmael strayed to the ways of the pagans, not by the demand of Sarah. Thus Hashem tells him to listen to the voice of Sarah. Abraham who was extremely rich would not send out his son Ishmael with only bread and water. Rather, the Torah is teaching us that Abraham hated Ishmael by following the ways of the world and no longer concerned himself with Ishmael.

Ya'akov ran away from home because Esav threatened to kill him after the passing of his father, Ya'akov who refused to discipline him because "Yitzchak loved Esav." (Gen 25:28) King David also did not discipline Avshalom that resulted in rebellion and David had to run on "barefoot while weeping" which led to deaths of thousands. (2Sam. Chapters 15-2) Avshalom became a thorn on David's life time, thus he said, "How numerous are my tormentors!" (Psa. 3:1-2)

¹ The Zohar, Shemos, 1:1

Therefore, Hashem disciplined Yisrael because of His love for them that they do not stray to the secular world. But they did as “the land was filled with them.” (Exo. 1:7) It was necessary and the afflictions were beneficial for Yisrael. For in the end, He gave them the Torah, the land flowing with milk and honey, and the World to Come. Their slavery hardened their body and they were able to withstand the journey in the wilderness. They had nothing as slaves, but left Mitzrayim with wealth. Once they were comfortable, they sinned by making a Golden Calf and Hashem had to step in again.

The Midrash continues by giving examples of people who discipline their children. Hashem said, “Because Avraham obeyed My voice” (Gen 26:5) meaning Avraham followed His commandments, His decrees. We know that Yitzchak followed his father’s footsteps because it is said, “And these are the generation of Yitzchak son of Avraham.” (Gen. 26:5) This verse teaches that Yitzchak’s way was similar to Avraham in everything, in beauty, in wealth, and in good deeds. Such proof is found when Yitzchak who was 37 years old when he was bound at Mount Moriah by a father who was old, and well on in years (Gen. 24:1), yet Yitzchak did not resist his binding. Therefore, because he accepted his father’s discipline, he received all his father had as said, “Avraham gave all that he had to Yitzchak.” (Gen. 25:5)

Ya’akov received the discipline from his father, for Yitzchak taught him Torah and disciplined him in house of study as said, “But Ya’akov was a wholesome man.” (Gen. 25:7) Afterwards, he studied in the house of Eber to continue his study. Therefore, Ya’akov merited receiving the blessing from Yitzchak as it was given to his father. Ya’akov also disciplined his children to walk the ways of Hashem for it is said, “And these are the names of the children of Yisrael.” (Exo. 1:1) Thus the meaning of Proverbs, “but he who loves him disciplines him in his youth.” It also indicates that all his children were righteous, thus the Torah starts with “And these are the names” in this week’s portion.