

TorahFax: Shemos
Rabbi Zalmen Marazov

Friday, Tevet 24, 5784 / January 5, 2024

This Shabbat we begin the second Book of the Torah, S'hmot (Exodus). The first Parsha is S'hmot.

The Parsha begins, "These are the names ("S'hmot") of the Children of Israel who came into Egypt with Yaakov (Jacob); every man and his household came."

The Torah continues to mention the names of all of Yaakov's children; "Reuben, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda; Isacchar, Zevulun and Binyamin; Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher and Joseph (who was already in Egypt)." Together, Yaakov, his children and their families, including Joseph and his family, who were already in Egypt, totaled "seventy souls".

Q. Our sages ask, "The names of the children of Yaakov were mentioned many times before. Why does the Torah begin the Book of S'hmot by mentioning their names again?"

A. According to the Midrash, one of the reasons for which the Jewish people merited the redemption from Egypt was due to the fact that all during their 210 years that they lived in Egypt they did not replace their original Hebrew names with Egyptian names.

Why didn't they change their names, as immigrants to a new country usually do? The reason is that through their Hebrew names they were able to keep their identity and their heritage to their forefather's, Abraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. By mentioning their names again in the beginning of S'hmot, which tells about the Exodus, the Torah emphasizes that keeping their Hebrew names was a major factor in their redemption from Egyptian exile.

Today is the 24th of Tevet - the Yartzeit of Rabbi Schneur Zalmen of Liadi - founder and first Rebbe of Chabad who passed away in 5573 (1812). May his memory be a blessing.

Rabbi Schneur Zalmen instilled in his followers a love for G-d, the Torah and Am Yisrael – the Jewish people. He taught that G-d could be found everywhere! He also taught that the process of creation was not a one-time occurrence. Instead, it is an on-going event and as a result makes us continually dependent and connected to G-d.

A Chassid of Rabbi Schneur Zalmen was once at the fair for business. At the end of the day, when it was time to calculate the total sum of goods which he bought, instead of writing the amount, he inadvertently wrote, "Ein od milvado" - "There is nothing except for G-d."

"You have a business to run," someone remarked. "You should concentrate on your business!"

The Chassid replied, "Doesn't it ever happen that during your prayers, when you should be meditating about G-d, you sometimes find yourself thinking about your business? Then, what is so terrible, if at the fair, when I should be thinking about my business, I get distracted and think about G-d!"

Thursday, Tevet 23, 5784 / January 4, 2024

Q. Parshat Shmot begins with, "These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt." Although in the context of the verse the translation is, "Who came to Egypt," yet, the Torah uses the word "Habaim," which literally means, "Who are coming," implying that they are coming now. Why does the Torah say, "Habaim" who are coming, rather than, "Sheba'u" – "Who came"?

A. Our sages explain that the Torah implies that the children of Israel, although, in the beginning they enjoyed of the best of the land, while Joseph was ruler of Egypt, yet, they never felt that Egypt was home. They didn't become comfortable there. Even after many years, they felt as if they were NOW coming, they were constant immigrants. Egypt was not home. They yearned to be back in their homeland – in Israel.

Q. How many years after Joseph's death did the enslavement of the Jewish people begin?

A. About twenty-two years after Joseph's passing.

Q. In telling us how the enslavement of the Jewish people came about, the Torah says, "There arose a new king over Egypt, who didn't know Joseph. He said to his people, 'The Children of Israel are more and stronger than we are...'" How is it possible that only twenty-two years after Joseph's death, "He didn't know Joseph"? How could the Egyptians forget that Joseph saved them from the great famine?

A. Our sages explain the verse to mean that he didn't want to know Joseph! Pharaoh and his people began acting as if they didn't know Joseph. They chose to forget what Joseph did for them and instead of appreciation, turned against his family and his people. It demonstrates the short memory so many people and nations choose to have when it comes to the people of Israel.

As we watch the demonstrations all over the world these days against Israel and Jews, we see how conveniently the world chose to forget the Jewish contributions to global welfare.

Jews currently make up approximately 0.25% of the world's population and 2% of the US population. Yet, Jews and persons of Jewish ancestry account for 23% of all individual recipients of the Nobel Prize.

Jews in the U.S., while only 2% of the U.S. population, account for 37% of all U.S. recipients of Nobel Prizes! In the scientific research fields of Chemistry, Economics, Medicine, and Physics,

the corresponding world and U.S. percentages are 27% and 40%, respectively! The entire world, including Arabs, have greatly benefited from these scientific and medical contributions. Yet, we didn't see any demonstrations when Jews, infants, women, and the elderly are slaughtered by Hamas Nazis. No demonstrations when Hamas rockets fall on Israeli cities. Is history repeating itself? How did the world today, like the ancient Egyptians 3000 years ago, choose to forget how much they benefit from us? The real question is WHY?

Tuesday, Tevet 21, 5784 / January 2, 2024

The Torah reading this Shabbat is Parshat Shmot, which begins the Book of Exodus.

In this Parsha we will read about the enslavement of the Jewish people, (Children of Israel, as they are called in the Torah) in Egypt. We read about Moshe's (Moses) birth and how G-d chose him to lead the Jewish people out of Egypt.

The name of the Parsha, "Shmot" means "names". Parshat Shmot begins, "Ve'aileh Shmot Bnei Yisrael Habaim Mitzreimah" – "These are the names of the children of Israel who came to Egypt." The Torah then mentions the names of Yaakov's sons, who came with him to Egypt.

Q. Our sages ask, we already know, from a previous Parsha, the names of Yaakov's children who came with him to Egypt. Why does the Torah repeat it in the beginning of this Parsha?

A. They reply: The Torah wants to emphasize that even in Egypt, they didn't change their names. Just like they entered into Egypt with their Hebrew names, so too, throughout their two hundred and ten year stay in Egypt, they kept their identity and didn't change their names. Thus, the Book of Shmot, which tells about the enslavement and Exodus from Egypt, begins with their Hebrew names, to tell us that due to their Jewish identity, they merited the Exodus.

Jewish identity is crucial to Jewish survival. It is not enough to be Jewish at heart, we also have to act and identify as Jews.

Q. Yehudah was Yaakov's fourth son. The tribe of Yehudah was one of twelve tribes. Most of the Jewish people do not come from the tribe of Yehudah, yet, we see that all Jews are called, "Yehudi." This is so in many other languages; Yid, Yahud, Juden, etc. Why are all Jews called, "Yehudah"?

A. In last week's Parsha, Yaakov blessed his children. He says to Yehudah, "Yehudah, your brothers acknowledge your greatness." Says the Midrash, "Yaakov said to Yehudah, "Everyone will admit to your greatness and because of this the Jewish nation will be called by your name, "Yehudi/Yehudim."

Also, the name Yehudah, has in it the four letters which spell G-d's name. Every Jew is called, Yehudi, to emphasize that within every Jew rests G-d's presence.

Another point: Yehudah means “praise” and “thanks.” The reason his mother, Leah, named him Yehudah is because she said, “I give praise to G-d for giving me a fourth son.” Leah felt that, with the birth of Yehudah, G-d gave her more than her share. She greatly appreciated G-d’s gift, praising and thanking G-d.

Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk explains, “Every Jew is called Yehudi, to teach us that a Jew has to understand and feel, that whatever G-d grants us is more than what we deserve. Such an outlook on life brings a person true and lasting happiness.