



SHEMOT

When Pain Spells Gain

The Key to Unlocking Your Deepest Self

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Shemot

The Children of Israel multiply in Egypt. Threatened by their growing numbers, Pharaoh enslaves them and orders the Hebrew midwives, Shifrah and Pu'ah, to kill all male babies at birth. When they do not comply, he commands his people to cast the Hebrew babies into the Nile.

A child is born to Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, and her husband, Amram. This baby is placed in a basket on the river, while the baby's sister, Miriam, stands watch from afar. Pharaoh's daughter discovers the boy, raises him as her son, and names him Moses.

As a young man, Moses leaves

the palace and discovers the hardship of his people. He sees an Egyptian beating a Hebrew and kills the Egyptian. The next day, he sees two Jews fighting; when he admonishes them, they reveal his deed of the previous day, and Moses is forced to flee to Midian. There, he rescues Jethro's daughters, marries one of them (Zipporah), and becomes a shepherd of his father-in-law's flocks.

G d appears to Moses in a Burning Bush at the foot of Mount Sinai and instructs him to go to Pharaoh and demand, "Let My people go, so that they may serve Me." Moses's brother, Aaron, is appointed to

serve as his spokesman. In Egypt, Moses and Aaron assemble the elders of Israel to tell them that the time of their redemption has come. The people believe them, but Pharaoh refuses to let them go and even intensifies the suffering of Israel.

Moses returns to G d to protest, "Why have You done evil to this people?" G d promises that their redemption is close at hand.



Which
runner
comes out
ahead?

TEXT 1

*Talmud, Rosh
Hashanah 11a*

בְּרֵאשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה בְּטוֹלָה עֲבוּדָה
מֵאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּמִצְרַיִם.

The bondage of our
ancestors in Egypt ended
on Rosh Hashanah.

TEXT 2

*Midrash, Tanchuma,
Va'era 13*

אמר רבי אבין הלוי ברבי: ממכת הדם
העשירו ישראל.

כיצד?

המצרי וישראל בבית אחד והגיגית מלאה
מים, והמצרי הולך למלאות את הקיתון
מתוכה, מוציאה מלאה דם. וישראל שותה
מים, ומצרי דם מתוך הגיגית.

והמצרי אומר לו: תן לי בידך מעט מים.
ונותן לו, ונעשים דם.

אמר ליה: נשתה בתוך הקערה אני ואתה
ביחד. ישראל שותה מים, והמצרי שותה
דם.

וכשהיה לוקח מישראל בדמים יקרים, היה
שותה מים. מכאן העשירו ישראל.

Rabbi Avin the Levite, son of Rebbe, said, “The
plague of blood brought great wealth to the Jews.”

How so?

If an Egyptian and a Jew were in a home with a
barrel full of water, the water turned to blood in
the ladle of the Egyptian, but remained pure water
in the ladle of the Jew.

If the Egyptian asked the Jew for some water from
his or her ladle, the water turned to blood in the
hands of the Egyptian.

If the Egyptian suggested that they drink together
from the same ladle, the Jew would drink water,
and the Egyptian would drink blood.

The only way for an Egyptian to have water was to
purchase it from a Jew at an exorbitant rate. Thus,
the Jews grew wealthy.

TEXT 3

Exodus 1:1-3

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִמָּה, אֵת יַעֲקֹב
אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ.

רְאוּבֵן, שִׁמְעוֹן, לֵוִי, וַיהוּדָה.

יִשָּׂשכָר, זְבוּלֹן, וּבְנִימֵן.

דָּן, וְנַפְתָּלִי, גָּד, וְאַשֶּׁר.

. . . וַיֹּסֶף הָיָה בְּמִצְרָיִם.

These were the names of the Children of Israel who entered Egypt with Jacob; each came with his family.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah.

Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin.

Dan, Naftali, Gad, and Asher.

. . . And Joseph was already in Egypt.

TEXT 4A

Rashi, Exodus 1:1

אֶף עַל פִּי שְׂמִנָּאן בְּחַיֵּיהֶם בְּשִׁמוֹתָם,
חָזַר וּמְנָאם בְּמִיתָתָם, לְהוֹדִיעַ חֲבָתָם.

Although G-d counted the twelve tribes by name when they were alive, He counted them again after their passing to let us know how precious we are to Him.

TEXT 4B

*Midrash, Shemot
Rabah 4:5*

"וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", עַל שֵׁם
גְּאֻלַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל נִזְכְּרוּ כָּאן.

רְאוּבֵן, שְׁנַאֲמַר: "רָאָה רָאִיתִי אֶת עַנְי
עַמִּי" (שְׁמוֹת ג, ז).

שִׁמְעוֹן, עַל שֵׁם: "וַיִּשְׁמַע אֱלֹקִים אֶת
נַאֲקָתָם" (שָׁם ב, כד).

לֵוִי, עַל שֵׁם שְׁנַתְחַבֵּר הַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא לְצַרְתָּם מִתּוֹךְ הַסְּנָה, לְקַיֵּם מֵה
שְׁנַאֲמַר: "עִמּוֹ אֲנֹכִי בְּצָרָה" (תְּהִלִּים
צא, טו).

יְהוּדָה, עַל שֵׁם שְׁהוּדוֹ לְהַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ
הוּא.

"These are the names of the Children of Israel":
the names were enumerated here to connote
their future redemption.

The name Reuben [which means to see] alludes
to the passage, "I saw the suffering of my
nation" (Exodus 3:7).

The name Simeon [which means to hear] alludes
to the passage, "And G-d heard their moans"
(Exodus 2:24).

The name Levi [which means attachment]
alludes to the fact that G-d connected with
their suffering at the Burning Bush. This fulfills
the passage, "I am with them in distress"
(Psalms 91:15).

The name Judah [which means to give thanks]
alludes to the fact that the Jews gave thanks to
G-d [when He redeemed them].

The Messages of the Names:



QUESTION

The name of a Torah portion should describe the content of the portion.

Why does the name of the portion of suffering connote love and redemption?



In the time of the Temple, our conception of G-d was clear and concrete. You had a palpable sense of G-d's presence.

TEXT 5A

Talmud, Chagigah 2a

כדרך שבא לראות כך
בא ליראות.

As they came to see,
so did they come to be
seen.

TEXT 5B

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5670, p.
224*

והנה בזמן הבית, היה מאיר גילוי אלקות . . . בכללות בית המקדש
היה מאיר גילוי אלקות. ועל ידי זה היה מאיר גילוי אלקות בעולם.

מה שאין כן בזמן הגלות, כתיב: "אותותינו לא ראינו" (תהלים עד, ט)
משום שאינו מאיר גילוי אלקות . . . למטה. שיש ריבוי העלמות.

When the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the Divine Presence was discernible in the world. . . . It was palpable in the Temple, and from there, it spilled over into the rest of the world.

By contrast, the Psalmist wrote of the Exilic era, “We have not seen our signs” (Psalms 74:9) because the Divine Presence is no longer discernible . . . in the material world. There are too many concealments.

TEXT 5C

*Rabbi Shalom Dovber
Schneerson, Ibid., pp.
224–225*

כמו כן הוא בעבודה בנפש האדם גם החילוק בין זמן הבית וזמן הגלות. דבזמן הבית הי' מאיר גילוי אלוקות בנשמות ישראל, דאז הי' עבודה אמיתית במוח ולב, שהי' בהם השגה גמורה והי' מאיר גילוי אור בנפשם ונקלט במוחם. וממילא הי' מזה ההתפעלות בבחינת אהבה וקירוב . . . ודביקות באלקות. . . שאז הי' כלים ראויים לזה.

. . . מה שאין כן בזמן הגלות אינו מאיר בחינת ראיית המהות, שזהו שכתוב, "אני ישינא בגלותא" (זהר חלק ג, צה א). והשינה אינו ניכר רק בעיניים שזהו מה שנסתם עיניו. וזהו מה שבגלות אינו מאיר בחינת הראי' באלקות, כי אם רק בחינת השגה בלבד. דעבודה בזמן הגלות הוא רק בבחינת השגה, מה שאין כן בחינת הראיה באלקות לא יש בזמן הגלות כלל.

In the Temple era, we had a very different relationship with G-d than today. At that time, we sensed G-d verily in our souls; we comprehended Him thoroughly, felt His presence palpably, and grasped Him intuitively. This primed us for an organic mind-heart relationship with G-d, and we formed a real love, closeness, . . . and even attachment to Him. . . .

Now, in Exile, we can't perceive G-d. This is the meaning of the phrase, "I am asleep in Exile" (Zohar, vol. 3, p. 95a). Sleep is observed primarily in the eyes. The phrase "we are asleep in Exile" refers to our eyes being closed—we cannot see G-d. At best, we have a [murky] understanding of G-d. Thus, our relationship with G-d is rooted in our effort to understand Him. We are unable to see Him.

QUESTION

Our relationship with G-d today is more apathetic than the one we had in the time of the Temple, but the shocking part is that we're still in the relationship.

We kept the bowl on the table for 3,326 years.

Why?



ANSWER

Our bond with G-d is our identity. We are not investing in something outside of us, in which case, we would require motivation and incentive. It is *who we are*.

We can't stop being Jewish any more than we can stop being ourselves.



TEXT 6A

*Rabbi Manis Friedman,
“Cold Soup,”
www.chabad.org*

Three thousand, three hundred and twenty-six years ago, G-d asked us if we would marry Him. We had an extraordinary wedding ceremony, with great special effects—we were wowed. After the wedding, He said, “I have a few things I’d like you to take care of for Me, so, please. . . . I’ll be right back.” He hasn’t been heard from since. For more than three thousand, three hundred years. He has sent messengers, messages, postcards—you know, writing on the walls . . . but we haven’t heard a word from Him in all this time.

Imagine a couple gets married, and the man says to his new wife, “Would you make me something to eat, please? I’ll be right back.” She begins preparing. The guy comes back 3300 years later, walks into the house, up to the table, straight to his favorite chair, sits down, and tastes the soup that is on the table. The soup is cold.

What will his reaction be? If he’s a wise man, he won’t complain. Rather, he’ll think it’s a miracle that the house is still there, that his table and favorite chair are still there. He’ll be delighted to see a bowl of soup at his place. The soup is cold? Well, yes, over 3300 years, soup can get cold.

TEXT 6B

*Rabbi Manis Friedman,
Ibid.*

Ask the Jew sitting in the synagogue on Yom Kippur, fasting, “Do you believe in G-d?”

You cannot get a straight answer. “Umm, it depends on what you mean by G-d.” That’s if they’re the philosophical type. Otherwise, they’ll simply say, “What am I? A rabbi? I don’t know.” . . .

So, you ask what appears to be a logical question. “Then why are you here?”

For some reason, this average Jew, who doesn’t believe in G-d and is not very religious, will look at you like you’re crazy and say, “What do you mean? It’s Yom Kippur!”

This is not normal.

Let’s analyze this for a moment. What is this Jew actually saying? You asked him if he believes in G-d, and he said [no]. Or “When I was younger, I used to.” Or “When I get older, I’ll start to.”

“So, you don’t believe in G-d?”

“No. I don’t.”

“Are you religious?”

“Furthest thing from it.”

. . .

TEXT 6B

*Rabbi Manis Friedman,
Ibid.*

“So why are you here?”

“Because it’s Yom Kippur!”

What he’s saying is this: “Why am I here? Because G-d wants a Jew to be in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. So where else should I be?”

So, you say: “But you don’t believe in G-d.”

He says, “So what?” and he doesn’t understand your problem.

He is saying: “Today is Yom Kippur, even if I don’t have a calendar. This is a synagogue, even if I don’t like it. I am a Jew, even if I’m not religious, and G-d is G-d, even when I don’t believe in Him. So, what’s your problem?” . . .

The same thing happens on Passover. Every Jew sits by a Seder. Ask the average Jew at a Seder, do you believe in G-d? Leave me alone. Are you religious? He chokes on the matzah laughing. So, you’re celebrating the Exodus from Egypt 3300 years ago? History is not my subject. Then why are you here? Where should I be? It’s Passover!

That’s what’s so magnificent about the Jew.

The *Galus* Paradox

We discover something about our intrinsic selves when we lose every vestige of our relationship with G-d and remain in the game anyway.



TEXT 7

*Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak
Schneersohn, Sefer
Hamaamarim 5709, pp.
119–120*

אמנם המבין יבין דבהכרח לומר דיש
עכשיו כחות בנשמות ישראל לעמוד גם נגד
המונעים. . . .

והיינו מצד הכחות דמסירת נפש שיש
עכשיו יותר מבזמן הבית. . . . שבעונותינו
הרבים נתמעטו המוחין והלבבות. . . . אך
מכל מקום ולבי ער, דבחינת המסירת נפש
הוא בנקל הרבה יותר מבזמן הבית. וכל
אחד ואחד מישראל, בנקל לו עכשיו לעורר
בנפשו האהבה לאלקות שלמעלה מטעם
ודעת. . . . ואין צריך יגיעה רבה כל כך.

אך היא הנותנת. שמפני שאין השכל מאיר
בגילוי כל כך ואינו מסתיר על עצם הנפש,
הרי בעצם נקודת הלב מאיר ומתפשט
הנפש בגילוי. והוא האמונה פשוטה שיש
בכל אחד ואחד מישראל, ולהיות סור מרע
בתכלית, ולדבקה בו על ידי קיום המצות.

It is obvious that the Jewish soul is fortified during Exile to withstand the fierce opposition it encounters. . . .

This is because our intrinsic relationship with G-d is more evident today than it was in the Temple era. . . . Though our minds and hearts have a reduced capacity to perceive and feel G-d due to our sins, . . . our hearts remain alert to G-d. It is easier to sense our intrinsic oneness with G-d today than it was in the Temple era. Today, every Jew can easily arouse their inherent love for G-d that transcends all logic . . . without much effort.

Ironically, the darkness of Exile is the very reason [for the emergence of our intrinsic oneness]. When our intellectual relationship with G-d fades, it stops covering up our essence. The darkness of Exile allows our inherent connection with G-d to emerge and expand in the deepest chambers of our hearts. This translates into an unshakable faith in G-d, and a commitment to avoid sin and to embrace G-d through His commandments.



Faith is like a muscle; it grows from resistance.

TEXT 8A

*“Resistance Training—
Health Benefits,”
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au*

Resistance training is based on the principle that muscles of the body will work to overcome a resistance force when they are required to do so.

When you do resistance training repeatedly and consistently, your muscles become stronger.

TEXT 8B

Deuteronomy 4:29

וּבְקִשְׁתֶּם מֵשֶׁם אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֵיכֶם וּמָצְאתֶם,
כִּי תִדְרֹשׁוּנוּ בְּכָל לִבְבְּכֶם וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁכֶם.

When you seek G-d, your G-d,
from there, you will find Him.
Because you will seek Him with
all your heart and all your soul.

TEXT 9A

Deuteronomy 4:20

וְאַתְּכֶם לָקַח ה', וַיּוֹצֵא אֶתְכֶם
מִכּוּר הַבַּרְזֵל מִמִּצְרַיִם, לִהְיוֹת לוֹ
לְעַם נַחֲלָה כִּיּוֹם הַזֶּה.

G-d brought you out of the iron crucible, Egypt, to be a people of His possession, as of this day.

TEXT 9B

Exodus 3:12

בְּהוֹצִיאֶךָ אֶת הָעָם מִמִּצְרַיִם,
תַּעֲבֹדוּן אֶת הָאֱלֹהִים עַל הַהָר הַזֶּה.

When you bring the nation
out of Egypt, you will worship
G-d on this mountain.

TEXT 10

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 16, p. 37*

דער נאמען פון א מענטשן האט א שייכות צום עצם האדם ווי ער איז העכער פון די כחת הגלויים שלו.

און די הוכחה דערויף: ב'שעת מען רופט א מענטשן ביי זיין נאמען, גיט ער זיך א ווענד און א קער בכל עצמותו.

און נאכמער, ווען א מענטש חלש'ט רחמנא לצלן, וואס דאס מיינט אז דער חיות הנפש איז אין א מצב פון התעלמות און איז אפגעטראגן פון גילוי בגוף, ווערט דער מענטש דערמינטערט דורך דעם וואס מען רופט אים ביי זיין נאמען. וואס דאס איז א באווייז אז דער שם האט א קשר און רירט אן אין עצם חיות הנפש און דערפאר האט ער בכח צו ממשיך זיין די חיות צוריק אין די כחות הגוף.

דאס הייסט אז דער עצם פון דעם אדם דריקט זיך אויס דוקא דארט וואו עס זעט זיך ניט קיין גלוי'דיקע שייכות צום מענטשן. בדוגמא ווי גערעדט פריער אין דער מעלת העבודה פון זמן הגלות, אז דער עצם פון א אידן ווערט נתגלה דוקא אין דעם העלם והסתר פון זמן הגלות.

Our names are linked to our essence; they transcend all our surface dimensions.

The proof is that when we summon someone by name, they turn to us in their entirety.

Moreover, when someone faints, G-d forbid, their life force is in a state of concealment and suspension from the body. Yet, one way to revive them is by calling their name. This demonstrates that the name touches and is bound to our deepest source of life. This is why it can summon our life force back into our bodies.

This demonstrates that our essence emerges [in our own name, from which] we appear to be absent. This is like our earlier discussion about our relationship with G-d during Exile. Our intrinsic connection with G-d only emerges in Exile when G-d is hidden and concealed.

ANSWER

The first few passages of the Torah portion, and the name of the portion itself, teach us the heart and soul, the purpose and meaning, of exile and suffering.

KEY POINTS

1. Counting and enumerating the names of the Jews connotes three positive messages: (a) G-d loves us, (b) our suffering was minimized, and (c) a promise of redemption.
2. In the era of the Temple, Jews saw G-d and felt that G-d saw them. In Exile, we can't see G-d; we can only know Him in the abstract.
3. Therefore, our relationship with G-d today is not as authentic as it was in the era of the Temple.

KEY POINTS

4. We remain connected with G-d despite the Exile because our inability to see G-d shows us that we are one with G-d. We can't part with G-d any more than we can part with ourselves.
5. The inner purpose of suffering is the liberation of our deepest selves. This is why the name of the Torah portion that describes our suffering connotes positive messages of liberation and love.

