

עזרי דשמוס

**Alei Deshe - Weekly Torah Insights and inspiration on
the Parsha from the Rosh Yeshiva Shlit"za of Gur**

Who Is a Jew?

Sefer Shemos begins: *ואלה שמות בני ישראל*. *Baal Haturim* notes that these words contain the *roshei teivos* (acronym) of: *אדם אשר לומד הסדר שנים* - *One who learns the parshah – the pasuk twice and the Targum once – in a pleasant, continuous voice, will certainly live many long years.*

Sefarim wonder why the obligation of *shnayim mikra v'echad targum* would be hinted to at the beginning of Sefer Shemos; wouldn't the beginning of the Torah be a more appropriate place?

Apparently, there is something unique about the Targum of Sefer Shemos, but what is it? The *mefarshim* of the Targum note that in Sefer Bereishis, *עברי* is translated as *עבראה*, while in Sefer Shemos it is rendered *יהודאה*.

On a simple level, this may be because Bereishis discusses the time when the Avos and their progeny were in Eretz Yisrael, known as *עבר הנהר* - *across the river*; thus, the Targum refers to them as *עבראה*. But Shemos discusses the period when they were no longer in *עבר הנהר*; they are therefore referred to as *יהודאה*.

The Shinover Rav¹ said that the reason Yidden are referred to as *עברים* is to remind us that this world is merely a *מעבר*, a passageway to the next world. This may be another reason for the Targum's shift in translating *עברי*. Sefer Bereishis discusses the period when Bnei Yisrael dwelled securely in their land. When life is comfortable, people need to be reminded of the temporal nature of this world, and so they were termed *עבראה*. But Sefer Shemos deals with *galus*. During this time, they didn't need a reminder of the preeminence of *Olam Haba*. Thus, Targum renders them *יהודאה*.

¹ *Divrei Yechezkel*, Shemos 5:3

It must be noted, however, that this distinction applies to a physical *galus*, such as *galus Mitzrayim*. In a spiritual exile such as our present one, our material comforts place us once again in danger of losing sight of the fleeting nature of this world, and we must remind ourselves that we are

עברים - we stand apart from the rest of the world² - and that this world is merely a stopover on our journey to *Olam Haba*.

There is another approach. The Midrash comments on the pasuk (Bereishis 49:8) *יהודה אתה יודוך אחיך* - *Yehudah – you, your brothers shall acknowledge*: "All of your brothers will be called by your name; people will not say, 'I am a Reuveini'; 'I am a

Shimoni,' but rather, 'I am a Yehudi.'" This blessing was given to Yehudah in Parshas Vayechi, at the very end of Sefer Bereishis. Thus, it is only in Sefer Shemos - after Yehudah's *brachah* - that the Targum refers to Bnei Yisrael as *יהודאה*.³

We may suggest yet another approach. The Gemara (Megillah 13a), commenting on the title 'Mordechai HaYehudi,' states that anyone who rejects *avodah zarah* is called 'Yehudi.' But wouldn't any Yid give his life to reject *avodah zarah*?⁴

I heard from my father that his father, the Imrei Emes, would refer to a *bris milah* as "*Yiddishen*" (making the baby a Yid); he would say, "*m'Yiddisht*

² See *Bereishis Rabbah* 42:8

³ See end of *Lishkas Hasofer*; *Torah Sheleimah* no. 156*; *Likutei Yehudah Hachadash*, Shemos 1:19

⁴ As stated in *Tanya* (chap. 18)

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**Our entire lives are a
string of battles against
the yetzer hara, whom we
must struggle to defeat
on a regular basis.**

לעילוי נשמת
מרת
עקא עדנה
צפורה ע"ה
בת משה מנחם הלוי ז"ל

ihm – we’re making him a Yid.” How do we understand this; isn’t one born a Yid?⁵

One of the *roshei hayeshivos* once declared to the non-religious public of Eretz Yisrael, “What makes you Jewish?” Indeed, we must wonder: what makes us Yidden? We don’t earn that title with a rote performance of the mitzvos; we must invest blood, sweat and tears into our *Yiddishkeit*. The Gemara (Kesubos 8a) says that we do not recite *שהשמחה במעונו* at a *bris milah* because the baby is in pain. But why should the baby’s pain prevent us from expressing his parents’ joy⁶ at this tremendous mitzvah? After all, none of the other participants feel any pain. The Imrei Emes explained that the parents’ wedding, at which *שהשמחה במעונו* was recited, was in preparation for their child’s *bris*.

We may explain, however, that the child’s pain is essential to the *milah*. Indeed, the *poskim*⁷ write that a child should not receive a *bris* under anesthesia. The very significance of *milah* is its element of *mesirus nefesh*,⁸ as is stated in our parshah (4:26) *וְהָיָה לְךָ אֶת הַיָּמִים לְמוֹלַת - A bridegroom’s bloodshed was because of circumcision*. Since the baby’s pain is fundamental to *milah*, it would be improper to disregard it by reciting *שהשמחה במעונו*.

The Berditchever’s father-in-law once asked him what he gained by traveling to the Mezritcher Maggid. He replied, “I learned there that there is a *Ribbono Shel Olam*.” His father-in-law retorted harshly, “For that you needed to abandon your family? Even our maid knows that there is a *Ribbono Shel Olam*!” The Berditchever replied, “she says there is a *Ribbono Shel Olam*. But I know there is a *Ribbono Shel Olam*!” Similarly, every Yid

5 See Nedarim 31b, that a Jew who is uncircumcised can be considered circumcised.

6 See Niddah 31b

7 See *Imrei Yosher*, vol. 2 no. 140; *Eretz Tzvi*, vol. 1 no. 56

8 See *She’elos U’Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, Yoreh Deah 245*

intrinsically has the potential for *mesirus nefesh* to reject *avodah zarah*, but it cannot be compared to an actual act of *mesirus nefesh*. One who wants to be a true Yehudi must not only talk of giving everything away for Hashem, but must invest his all to overcome *nisyonos* and uphold the Torah. This is why a *bris* is called *Yiddishen*: one’s level of ‘Yehudi’ depends on his level of *mesirus nefesh* for *Yiddishkeit*. Since, as we see, *mesirus nefesh* is part and parcel of *milah*, it is through *milah* that he can be called a Yid.

The Gemara (Sotah 36b) states that Yosef, who was *mekadesh Shem Shamayim* privately, received an addition of one letter of the *Shem Hashem* to his name, but Yehudah, who was *mekadesh Shem Shamayim* publicly, merited that his entire name is made of the letters of the *Shem Hashem*. In truth, even a public *kiddush Hashem* need not be comprised of one great demonstration of *mesirus nefesh*. Our entire lives are a string of battles against the *yetzer hara*, whom we must struggle to defeat on a regular basis. Someone once told the Chiddushei HaRim about a *sefer* full of strategies for defeating the *yetzer hara*. He replied, “The *yetzer hara* has a sack full of counter-strategies.”⁹ One who consistently overcomes his desires and gives his all for the Torah can be called a Yehudi — after Yehudah, who earned the letters of Hashem’s Name for his *mesirus nefesh*.¹⁰

We can now understand that it was specifically after Bnei Yisrael were in *galus* and maintained their *Yiddishkeit* with *mesirus nefesh* that they were worthy of being called *יהודא*. In addition, we see an inherent message of encouragement in that Hashem, Whose Name is contained in Yehudah’s name, was present and is present throughout all the *galuyos*, helping every Yid who wishes to overcome his *yetzer hara* and elevate himself in *taharah* and *kedushah*.

(ס"ג פרשת שמות תשע"ז)

9 See *Likutei HaRim*, vol. 2 p. 159

10 See Maharsha, *Chiddushei Aggados* to Megillah 13a

Keeping Apart

Hashem commanded Moshe (Shemos 3:16-18): *וְאָמַרְתָּ אֶת זְקַנְיֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְגו' פִּקְדוֹתַי וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְגו' וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ - Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them... “I have surely remembered you...” They will heed your voice*. Rashi explains that Bnei Yisrael awaited the words *פִּקְדוֹתַי* as a sign of redemption, because Yaakov had said (Bereishis 50:24), *וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְגו' וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ -G-d will surely remember you*, and Yosef had said (Bereishis 50:25), *וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם וְגו' וְשָׁמְעוּ לְקוֹלְךָ -G-d will indeed remember you*. The question on this

is well known: what confidence could there be in the sign of *פִּקְדוֹתַי*? Surely any charlatan could adopt those words to present himself as the redeemer. What does it mean that this was a sign?

Our Rebbeim explained that *פִּקְדוֹתַי* is an expression of longing; it would be the task of the true redeemer to arouse a yearning for redemption in the hearts of the Yidden. With his pronouncement of *פִּקְדוֹתַי*, Bnei

Yisrael would recognize that their true place is not among the nations. An impostor could not achieve this; only Hashem’s designated redeemer could instill in the people this feeling of no longer tolerating an existence of *galus*. Bnei Yisrael would then know that the true redeemer had arrived – because this feeling itself would bring the *geulah*.¹¹

11 See sources cited in *Ibra D’dasha* vol. 2 p. 341 footnote 2

Let us explore this on a deeper level. The Gemara (Pesachim 33b) records a debate whether the wine contained in grapes is considered *מיבלע בליעי* - absorbed, or *מיפקד פקידי* - set aside. Is the wine considered a part of the grapes, so that it only exists as wine once the grapes are squeezed; or is it already designated as wine while still inside the grapes? There is a practical ramification to this question: if one who is *tamei meis* touches a grape, which is subsequently squeezed, the status of the wine depends on this question. The grape is not *tamei*, since it had not been made susceptible to *tumah* (הוכשר לקבל טומאה); if the wine that's within it is merely a part of the grape, the wine is not *tamei*. But if wine is considered wine while still inside the grape, it itself is *tamei*, since wine is susceptible to *tumah*. *מיבלע בליעי* - absorbed? Or *מיפקד פקידי* - set aside?

When the redeemer would say *פְּקֹד פְּקֹדְתִי*, he would be reminding Bnei Yisrael that their status in *galus* must remain as *מיפקד פקידי*, set aside. They must not allow themselves to become *מיבלע בליעי*, absorbed into the surrounding nations; they must keep apart as their own entity. This concept remains true throughout the ages. *Sefarim* say that *galus Mitzrayim* was the root of all *galuyos*, and its *geulah* was the root of all

geulos. However, this is not limited to *galus* in its conventional form. When a *neshamah* leaves its place under the *kisei hakavod* and descends to this world in which Hashem's honor is hidden, it has gone into *galus*. In this form of *galus*, too, we must remember to remain *מיפקד פקידי*, not to feel settled and at home in *galus*. This physical world is not our place.

only engage in this-worldly pursuits as much as he must, while remaining *מיפקד פקידי*, separate from his physical surroundings.

In the *brachah* of *Asher Yatzar*, we say *ומפליא ומפליא* - and He acts wondrously. The Rema¹² explains this as a reference to the wondrous fusion of the spiritual *neshamah* with the physical body. We may add that *ומפליא* is also an expres-

Sefarim say that galus Mitzrayim was the root of all galuyos, and its geulah was the root of all geulos

We face the challenge of *מיבלע בליעי*, the pull to settle into our surroundings. The very air of our world is polluted with materialism, and with every step we stumble over its unrefined physicality. Under the *yetzer hara's* influence, we might even begin to feel good about it. We may not sense the filth, but our *neshamos* are choking! We must take great care not to fall under the negative influences of the world. One should

sion of separation, as in the pasuk (Bamidbar 6:2) *אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יִפְלֵא* - A man or woman who shall dissociate himself. Although our spiritual and physical components are bound together, we must be careful to maintain a distance between them, so that we do not find ourselves entangled in materialism.

(בנאות דשא - שמות תשפ"א)

12 Orach Chaim 5

Shabbos in Mitzrayim

וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעֹה אֶת פְּתָם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס - [Bnei Yisrael] built storage cities for Pharaoh, Pisom and Raamses (Shemos 1:11).

The Midrash¹³ relates: Seeing that the Bnei Yisrael had no rest, Moshe approached Pharaoh and said, "If a slave is not allowed to rest once a week, he will die. Your slaves, too — if you do not let them rest one day a week, they will die." Pharaoh agreed, and so Moshe established Shabbos as a day of rest. The *Tur*¹⁴ connects this to the words we say in *Shacharis* of Shabbos, *ישמח משה במתנת חלקו* - Moshe will rejoice at his gifted portion. For this reason, too, when Bnei Yisrael were subsequently commanded the mitzvah of Shabbos, Moshe told them (Shemos 16:29), *ראו כי ה' נתן לכם*,

השבת - See that Hashem has given you the Shabbos, in the past tense — because they had already been granted Shabbos as a day of rest during their servitude in Mitzrayim.¹⁵

Was the labor of Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim actually the kind that is forbidden on Shabbos?

*Maharik*¹⁶ writes that if one does work on Shabbos to avoid being killed or beaten, it may be considered a *melachah she'einah tzrichah l'gufah* (work done not for its primary purpose), which does not have the status of *melechtes Shabbos*, work forbidden on Shabbos. Some *Acharonim* disagree

13 Shemos Rabbah 1:28

14 Orach Chaim 281

15 See *Ba'alei Hatosafos* ad loc.

16 137

with this idea, but *Eglei Tal*¹⁷ cites it and seems to maintain that this is the halachah. Obviously, Bnei Yisrael were coerced into working for the Egyptians; according to *Maharik*, their work would be considered *melachah she'einah tzrichah l'gufah*. This would appear to be proof against *Maharik's* assertion, if we understand that Moshe's agenda was to enable them to avoid *melechtes Shabbos*. But this is not conclusive, since Moshe's goal was mainly to give them a reprieve from their difficult work. Additionally, the Midrash¹⁸ relates that the Bnei Yisrael used their day off to learn Torah; this may have been Moshe's intent as well.

However, the Bnei Yisrael's work may not have been considered *melachah she'einah tzrichah l'gufah* even according to *Maharik*. *Avnei Nezer*¹⁹ and *Chelkas Yoav*²⁰ write that Bnei Yisrael in Mitzrayim were not considered *poalim* (laborers hired by the day), but *kablanim* (hired by the job), as the pasuk (5:18) says, וְתַכְּן לְבָנִים תַּתֵּנוּ - but you must provide the quota of bricks.²¹ *Maharik* would agree that the work of a *kablan* is still *tzrichah l'gufah* even when coerced; thus, the work of the Bnei Yisrael was considered *melechtes Shabbos*.

There may be a different reason why the work of the Bnei Yisrael was not forbidden on Shabbos. The Gemara (Shabbos 102b) states that work that does not endure is not forbidden on Shabbos. Since, as the Gemara (Sotah 11a) states, the structures Bnei Yisrael were building in Pison and Raamses would collapse once built, it would seem that their construction was not a violation of Shabbos.

Perhaps, however, since the buildings' collapse was seemingly an unnatural phenomenon, it would not change the status of the construction into permitted work. We may bring proof to this idea. *Einei Ha'eidah*²² relates that he was told by agricultural workers that trees planted on Shabbos do not grow well. He explains that the *malach* that prods each blade of grass to grow²³ commands these trees to wilt and be uprooted. Now, since a work which is *mekalkel* (destructive) is not forbidden on Shabbos, any tree-planting on Shabbos should be viewed as such and be permitted. Clearly, unnatural phenomena cannot change the status of work on Shabbos.

However, *Einei Ha'eidah's* intent may be only that trees planted on Shabbos do not grow as well as they otherwise would, and not that they immediately wilt and die. Accordingly, their planting would not be considered *mekalkel*. This seems clear from a statement of the Gemara (Gittin 53b) that a tree planted intentionally on Shabbos must be uprooted. If it did not grow at all, what need would there be to uproot it? Obviously, it does grow to some extent. Accordingly, there is no proof from *Einei Ha'eidah* that an unnatural phenomenon does not affect the status of work on Shabbos.

Why was it that the buildings of Pison and Raamses consistently collapsed? The *Maharsha*²⁴ explains that the *galus* was destined to last four hundred years, but there wasn't enough work to occupy all the Bnei Yisrael for so long. Thus, each time a building was built it would give way or be swallowed up by the ground, allowing more work to be done.

*Mahara*²⁵ writes that objects which have no reason for existence cannot last. Since there was no reason for the buildings other than to enslave the Bnei Yisrael with their construction, they could not endure.

*Be'er Mayim Chaim*²⁶ explains that Pharaoh had no use for the buildings; they were simply means of enslaving the Bnei Yisrael with harsh labor. By arranging that the buildings would sink into the ground after being built, there would be endless work for them to do. Additionally, the Bnei Yisrael would be disheartened, never being able to look forward to completing a job and resting from it, since each structure would collapse once it was built.

We should note that according to this approach, the buildings' collapse was not an unnatural phenomenon; it was caused by the manner and place of their construction. If so, their building may indeed have been considered *mekalkel*, and not forbidden on Shabbos.

(בנאות דשא – שמות תשפ"א)

17 *Hagahah in Hakdamah*

18 *Shemos Rabbah* 5:18

19 *Choshen Mishpat* 52:8

20 *Choshen Mishpat* 16

21 See *Shemos Rabbah* 5:18

22 By the author of *Shevet Mussar*, vol. 2, *Shir HaShirim* 5:1

23 *Bereishis Rabbah* 10:6

24 Sotah 11a, *Chiddushei Aggados* s.v. *Pison shemah*

25 *Gevuros Hashem* 15, see there at length

26 15:5