

# A Taste of Text: Source based learning for Shabbat

*This weekly sheet is brought to you by Rabbi Dr. Moshe Freedman of Northwood United Synagogue in conjunction with Shapell's/Darché Noam*

## PARSHAT BO

### DVAR TORAH: SOMETIMES QUANTITY MAKES QUALITY

Quality, in Judaism, usually triumphs over quantity. On Chanukah we celebrate Israel's victory, where the many were delivered into the hands of the few – *rabim beyad me'atim*. God's reason for choosing Israel, he says (Devarim 7:7), is not because of their massive numbers, "*lo merub'chem mikol ha'amim*" - for Israel is "*hame'at mikol ha'amim*," the smallest of the nations. Israel's special relationship with God is not because of their quantity; it is rather God's love for them, and the oath He made to their forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov (Devarim 7:8). Israel's greatness lies in their quality. They are the nation that comes from the Avot.

The appreciation of quality is at the root of the Torah's concept of *brachah*, blessing. Rashi, commenting on the blessing "You will eat your bread to satiation" (Vayikra 26:5), quotes the Torah Kohanim: "You will eat a little, but it will be blessed within you." Israel is not only blessed with abundance, but with high quality produce, where only a little bit is needed to satiate.

But quantity also plays an important part in Torah. Sometimes a mere quantitative change can bring about a qualitative one. The most obvious example is how the tenth member of a minyan transforms a group of Jews. As a minyan they can now recite Kaddish and Kedushah, and do Kriat Hatorah and Birkat Kohanim; as nine they could not. The Divine Presence rests within a minyan in a way it does not when one of the members are missing (Berachot 6a). This purely quantitative change brings about a qualitative one.

This concept also appears in our parshah, says the Maharal (Gevrot Hashem Chapter 3). When Israel left Egypt, the Torah tells us, it was 600,000 strong (Shemot 12:37). This number, says the Maharal, was not incidental. The number six indicates completion. One, representing a point, has no length. Two, representing a line, adds length, but lacks width. Four represents a plane, but still lacks depth. Only the number six represents complete three dimensional space. The Maharal goes on to explain why it was essential that there be six-hundred thousand and not some other multiple of six. But whatever the reason, the transition from the five-hundred ninety-nine thousand, nine-hundred and ninety-ninth person to the six-hundred thousandth was not only quantitative, it was qualitative; Israel was a totally different type of entity. Israel was now not merely a developing fetus, but a fully developed baby ready for birth.

An extreme example of very little extra quantity causing a radical change in quantity appears on Chagigah 9b. Hillel, is challenged by Ben Hei Hei that a verse in Tanach (Malachi 3:18) seems redundant. "Go and see the difference between a *tzaddik*, a righteous person, and a wicked one, between one who serves God and one who does not serve Him." Isn't a *tzaddik* one who serves God and a wicked the opposite? Answers Hillel: The one who serves God and the one who does not are both completely righteous, but you cannot compare someone who reviews his learning 100 times with one who learns it 101. He compares it to the rates of donkey drivers, who within a ten *parsa* distance have a one *zuz* charge, but for an eleven *parsa* trip the price jumps to two *zuz*. The Sefer Hatanya explains that since in those days the standard was to go over material 100 times, someone who learned it the 101st time went beyond the natural order. He is called one who serves God, for he overcame his nature for God's sake. Just one more review – a slight quantitative change – moved him into a qualitatively different category.

## SOURCE GUIDE: LEARN A RAMBAN WITH RABBI MENDEL FARBER

This week's source guide is built on source material Rabbi Mendel Farber prepared for the students who participated in his shiurim on the Ramban's commentary on Chumash. He guides us here through one of the Ramban's classic comments on parshat Bo.

### A. Nissan Is the First of the Months

#### The Verses:

<p><b>1. Shemot 13:1-3</b></p> <p>(1) God said to Moshe and Aharon in the land of Egypt, saying:</p> <p>(2) This month is for you the head of the months; it is the first of the months of the year.</p> <p>(3) Speak to the entire congregation of Israel, saying: On the tenth of this month they should take for themselves, every man a lamb for his paternal home, a lamb for each household.</p>	<p><b>ספר שמות פרק יב:א-ג</b></p> <p>(א) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה וְאֶל אַהֲרֹן בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לֵאמֹר:</p> <p>(ב) הַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה לָכֶם רֵאשִׁי הַחֹדָשִׁים רֵאשֹׁן הוּא לָכֶם לְחֹדְשֵׁי הַשָּׁנָה:</p> <p>(ג) דַּבְּרוּ אֶל כָּל עַדְת יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר בְּעֶשֶׂר לַחֹדֶשׁ הַזֶּה וַיִּקְחוּ לָהֶם אִישׁ שֶׁה לְבֵית אָבִת שְׁה לְבֵית:</p>
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#### The Ramban

<p><b>2. Ramban on Shemot 12:2</b></p> <p>The meaning behind "This month is for you the first of the months": This tells Israel to count this month as the first, and to count subsequent months as two and three until a twelve month year is completed. This is so there should be a remembrance of the great miracle, for every time we remember the months we will be reminded of the miracle. Therefore the Torah did not give names to the months. Rather, it uses expressions like "the third month" (Shemot 19:1), and says, "It was in the second month of the second year that the cloud rose," (Bamidbar 10:11), and "In the seventh month on the first of the month" (Bamidbar 29:1). This explains all such references.</p>	<p><b>רמב"ן על שמות יב:ב</b></p> <p>... וטעם החדש הזה לכם ראש חדשים, שימנו אותו ישראל חדש הראשון, וממנו ימנו כל החדשים שני ושלישי עד תשלום השנה בשנים עשר חדש, כדי שיהיה זה זכרון בנס הגדול, כי בכל עת שנזכיר החדשים יהיה הנס נזכר, ועל כן אין לחדשים שמ בתורה, אלא יאמר בחדש השלישי (להלן י"ט:א), ואומר ויהי בשנה השנית בחדש השני נעלה הענן (במדבר י"א), ובחדש השביעי באחד לחודש וגו' (שם כ"ט:א), וכן כלם:</p>
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We also have a daily remembrance of Shabbat by counting our days according to the number of days they follow Shabbat:

<p><b>3. Ramban on Shemot 12:2</b></p> <p>Similarly, the remembrance of the day of Shabbat is accomplished through our counting from it – the first day after Shabbat, the second day after Shabbat, like I will explain later (Ramban on Shemot 20:8). Similarly the remembrance of our Exodus from Egypt is done through counting the first month, the second and third months from our redemption.</p>	<p><b>רמב"ן על שמות יב:ב</b></p> <p>וכמו שתהיה הזכירה ביום השבת במנותינו ממנו אחד בשבת ושני בשבת, כאשר אפרש (להלן כ:ח), כך הזכירה ביציאת מצרים במנותינו החדש הראשון והחדש השני והשלישי לגאולתינו:</p>
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The Ramban now tells us that we shouldn't mistakenly think the reason the months are called by their numbers is that we are counting from the beginning of the year, because the year begins in Tishrei and not in Nissan:

#### 4. Ramban on Shemot 12:2

For this count is not according to the beginning of the year, for the beginning of our years is in Tishrei, as it says, "The festival of the ingathering of the harvest (Succot) shall be at the changing of the year." It is also written (concerning Sukkot), "[the Holiday of the Ingathering] as the year goes out" (Shemot 23:16). If so, when we call Nissan the first and Tishrei the seventh, its meaning is that it is first to the redemption and the seventh from it. This is the reason for the Torah [in our verse] using the expression, "It is the first for **you**," for it is not the first of the year, but rather the first for you, [Hashem telling us that] we will call it that as a remembrance of our redemption.

#### רמב"ן על שמות יב:ב

שאינן המנין הזה לשנה, שהרי תחלת שנותינו מתשרי, דכתיב (להלן לד:כב) וחג האסיף תקופת השנה, וכתיב (שם כג:טז) בצאת השנה, אם כן כשנקרא לחדש ניסן ראשון ולתשרי שביעי, פתרונו ראשון לגאולה ושביעי אליה. וזה טעם ראשון הוא לכם, שאיננו ראשון בשנה, אבל הוא ראשון לכם, שנקרא לו לזכרון גאולתינו:

Here the Ramban gives a different explanation than he did earlier in his commentary for the word לכם [previously the Ramban had explained that, as opposed to the Korban Pesach, for whom special rules applied when it was offered in Egypt, the mitzvah of sanctifying the new moon was given to us, the Jews of all generations]. The numbers of the months are not to establish the order of the year, but rather, they are for us, to remember the redemption.

This raises the obvious difficulty – why do we no longer call the months first, second, and third, etc., to remember the Exodus? The Ramban now explains why we started to call the months by names after the redemption from Babylonia and Persia, and stopped calling them by numbers:

#### 5. Ramban on Shemot 12:2

Our Sages have already mentioned this matter, when they said, "The names of the months came up with us from Bavel" (Yerushalmi Rosh Hashanah 1:2, Bereishit Rabbah 48:9). At first we did not have names for the months, for at first their count was as a remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt. But when we came up from Bavel, and fulfilled the biblical verse, "It will no longer be said, 'As Hashem lives, who brought up the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' rather, 'As Hashem lives, who brought up the Children of Israel from the land of the north,' (Yirmiyahu 16:14-15) we changed and began to call our months by their Babylonian names, to remember that we had lived there and Hashem, may He be blessed, took us up from there. For these names – Nissan, Iyar, and the rest – are Persian names, and are only found in the books of the prophets that come from Bavel (Zecharyah 1:7, Ezra 6:15, Nechemyah 1:1) and in Megillat Esther (3:7). Therefore the verse says, "In the first month, that is, the month of Nissan" (Esther 3:7, using both the Hebrew and the Persian names of the month), just as it says "He (Haman) cast the *pur* (the Persian expression for a lottery), that is the *goral* (the corresponding Hebrew expression). Even today, the gentiles in the lands of Persia and Media call them Nissan and Tishrei, etc., just as we do. We, therefore, use the names that remind us of the second redemption just as we did after our first redemption.

#### רמב"ן על שמות יב:ב

וכבר הזכירו רבותינו זה הענין, ואמרו שמות חדשים עלו עמנו מבבל (ירושלמי ר"ה א:ב, ב"ר מח:ט), כי מתחלה לא היו להם שמות אצלנו, והסבה בזה, כי מתחלה היה מניינם זכר ליציאת מצרים, אבל כאשר עלינו מבבל ונתקיים מה שאמר הכתוב (ירמיה טז:יד-טו) ולא יאמר עוד חי ה' אשר העלה את בני ישראל מארץ מצרים כי אם חי ה' אשר העלה ואשר הביא את בני ישראל מארץ צפון, חזרנו לקרא החדשים בשם שנקראים בארץ בבל, להזכיר כי שם עמדנו ומשם העלנו הש"י. כי אלה השמות ניסן אייר וזולתם שמות פרסיים, ולא ימצא רק בספרי נביאי בבל (זכריה א:ז, עזרא ו:טו, נחמיה א:א) ובמגילת אסתר (ג:ז). ולכן אמר הכתוב בחדש הראשון הוא חדש ניסן, כמו הפיל פור הוא הגורל (שם). ועוד היום הגוים בארצות פרס ומדי כך הם קוראים אותם ניסן ותשרי וכלם כמונו. והנה נזכיר בחדשים הגאולה השנית כאשר עשינו עד הנה בראשונה:

## FREEDOM OF SPEECH BY RABBI YITZCHAK SHURIN

In general, we find that the rabbis discouraged long-windedness, as it says in Pirkei Avot (1:17): “Vechol hamarbeh dvarim meivi chet – One who speaks excessively brings on sin.” They also applied this to learning: “A teacher should teach his student in the shortest fashion” (Pesachim 3b). It is therefore very curious that in order to properly fulfill the mitzvah of sippur yetziat Mitzrayim, telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, Chazal encouraged verbosity.

The Gemara tells us that the matzah is referred to as “lechem oni” not only because it is bread of affliction but because it is “lechem she’onim alav devarim harbeh,” bread about which many things are said (from the root ענה, to make a declaration). This is reinforced by the author of the Haggadah, who stresses from the outset, “Anyone who speaks much about the Exodus harei zeh meshubach is praiseworthy.” Reb Chaim Vital, the great kabbalist of Tsfat, explains the name “Pesach” as a combination of two words: peh sach, the mouth converses. Why is the idea of speech so intrinsically connected with our chag?

Telling our story of freedom is distinctly different from other speech-related mitzvot, like prayer or learning. Normally speech is merely a vehicle for the fulfillment of the mitzvah; but in the case of the Pesach Seder, the mitzvah lies in the speech itself. The essence of the mitzvah is not only the communication, but also the expression of freedom that speech represents. The more we speak, the more the atmosphere of freedom has been achieved.

Targum Onkeles on the verse, “God blew within his nostrils a soul of life, and man became a nefesh chayah, a living being” (Bereshit 2:7) says, “and man became a ruach memallela,” a speaking spirit. In other words, the essence of man’s creation is his ability to speak and communicate. If this ability ceases to exist, his essence is lost. Through speech, one gains clarity, and clarity leads to self-realization. Once a person or a nation realizes its individuality and uniqueness, it can never be enslaved because it realizes its true purpose.

When Moshe Rabbeinu came to Pharaoh, he did not suffice with, “Let my people go free” but always added, “veya’avduni”, “so that they can serve Me”. Freedom is not truly achieved unless one has consciousness of purpose; without this, man becomes a slave without a master.

Rabbi Yitzchok Meltzen, a friend of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, comments that the Haggadah tells the story of the rabbis leaning around the table in Bnei Brak to prove that not only when the Jews have peace and tranquility do we have the mitzvah to tell the story of the Exodus, but even in a state of war, exile, and subjugation, like that which was taking place then under Roman rule. As long as a nation has the liberty to express its history and vision, no matter how much that nation is subjugated, it still retains its independent character. In fact, when a nation is physically oppressed, it becomes even more necessary to realize its uniqueness, individuality, self-expression, and self-determination.

Here lies the secret of Jewish survival throughout our history. The Haggadah conveys the message that when times are rough, we must work harder and longer towards regaining our uniqueness of purpose. At that point, our students can say, “Our teachers, you have achieved freedom. Now fulfill your purpose and go serve God; higiya zman kriyat Shema, the time has come to say the Shema”.

**This issue is dedicated in memory of  
Batsheva bat Yisrael z"l**

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*This publication is compiled by the staff and Rabbonim at **Shapells/Yeshivat Darché Noam** for men and **Midreshet Rachel v'Chaya Seminary** for women in Jerusalem. Find out more about the **married couples' programme** and the **Pathways Israel** and **Pathways Plus** programmes offered at [www.darchenoam.org](http://www.darchenoam.org) +972-2-651-1178, 5 Beit Hakerem Street, Jerusalem.*

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