

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Lest they multiply, and when there be a war, they be added to our enemies... and Egypt made the children of Israel perform hard labor. (1:10,13).

Rabbi Avraham Levenstam of Emden, in his work *Tzeror Hachaim* (published 1820), writes that in every Jewish exile, the Jews were faithful subjects of their king and made no effort to rebel. All their prayers and longing for redemption never posed a contradiction to this faithfulness, because they knew that the hoped-for redemption would come not through their own effort, only from Above.

The Jews spent 210 years in Egypt, he writes, living all together in the land of Goshen, and it would have been easy for them to unite and launch an uprising against Egypt. They were strong enough for such a battle, as we see later that they roundly defeated Amalek, Sichon, Og and the nations of Canaan. In Egypt they were enslaved and afflicted, and yet it never occurred to them to rebel. The sole exception to this were some members of the tribe of Ephraim, who miscalculated the end of the exile by 30 years and left Egypt by force. They were punished for this – they were all killed by the Philistines at Gath (see Rashi on Shemos 15:14, on Yechezkel 37:1, and on Tehillim 78:9). We can be sure the other Jews did not join in this rebellion, for if they had, the Egyptians would have

punished them severely for it, and we have no tradition of such an event. Rather, they knew that the exile was a Divine decree and they bore it with great strength and self-control. When the time came, Hashem Himself took them out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm.

Rabbi Yosef Shaul Natanson, author of the responsa *Shoel Umeishiv*, asks: When Pharaoh feared that the Jews would join his enemies, why was his strategy to make them slaves? Wouldn't that make them even more likely to hate the Egyptians and fight against them? He answers that Pharaoh knew that Hashem had commanded the Jews not to rebel against their king, and that He had planted into their nature the inclination to accept subjugation. This is the meaning of the oath (*Kesubos* 111a) not to rebel against the nations – that He adjured them and made acceptance of the exile a part of their nature. Therefore, as long as the Jews were free and independent, Pharaoh feared them, but with the hard hand of taskmasters over them, they would realize that this was a decree of exile, and they would wait patiently for Hashem to redeem them. (*Divrei Shaul* on Shemos, p. 48)



And Moshe swore to live with the man, and he gave his daughter Tziporah to Moshe. (2:21)

Rashi, quoting *Nedarim* 65a, explains that the word "vayoe!" means "swore," that Moshe swore to his father-in-law Yisro that he would not leave Midyan without his permission. The Satmar Rav asks: Yisro knew that Moshe was a holy man. The Midrash says

that Yisro's daughters told him that the water in the well rose up for Moshe, and Yisro said, "This is a sign of the children of Yaakov!" Moshe was the only one able to pull out the miraculous staff, created on the sixth day of Creation, from the ground in Yisro's

garden (Pirkei Derabbi Eliezer 40). So why did Yisro need to make Moshe swear – wasn't a simple promise enough? Did he suspect such a great man of going back on his word?

The answer is, when Moshe pulled out the staff, Yisro knew that he would eventually return to Egypt and redeem the Jewish people. Since the geulah depended on Moshe, both Yisro and Moshe feared that in his great love for the Jewish people, and in his great distress at their suffering in exile, Moshe would go back to Egypt and start the geulah before the proper time. To prevent this, Moshe took an oath. Thus this oath was similar to the general oath on the Jewish people against attempting to end the exile on their own, before the proper time. The Satmar Rav writes that this is one of the reasons he

called his great work, which is devoted to explaining this oath, "Vayoel Moshe."

He adds that the name is also appropriate because the Midrash says (Shemos 28, on the posuk 20:1) that the Prophets were all standing at Har Sinai and they heard there all the words of prophecy they would ever say. Thus the book of Shir Hashirim, in which the Three Oaths are written ("I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, not to arouse or awaken the love before it is desired" – 2:7) was really first brought down through Moshe at Sinai, and only later publicized by Shlomo Hamelech. Hence, "Vayoel Moshe" – Moshe adjured the Jewish people not to attempt to end the exile before the proper time. (Introduction to Vayoel Moshe, p. 17)



And they said, “The G-d of the Ivrim has come to us...” (5:3)

The Midrash (Vayikra 32:5) brings these words as proof that the Jewish people did not change their language during the Egyptian exile; they continued to speak Hebrew, as did their ancestor Avraham, who was called “Avraham the Ivri” (Bereishis 14:13).

The Jewish people spoke Hebrew only until the beginning of the Second Temple era; from then on, they spoke Aramaic (Shulchan Aruch Harav, Talmud Torah 1:1). During the Babylonian exile, when Jews lived in a land full of idolatry, the Sages decided that it would be disrespectful to the Holy Tongue to continue speaking it in such a defiled environment (Chasam Sofer on Orach Chaim

85). Additionally, they realized that the people were no longer on a high enough level to use such a holy tongue as their everyday language, for sinful speech is much worse when spoken in Hebrew than when spoken in another language (Vayoel Moshe, p. 422). The Aramaic they used was not the same as that spoken by the gentiles; it was a special Jewish dialect, written with Hebrew letters. Thus they continued to uphold the principle of keeping a separate language. Later, Yiddish fulfilled the same function for European Jews.

This point was once made by Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin. In Jerusalem there lived a tzaddik who sat all day wearing tallis and tefillin and learning Torah, and he

adopted the practice of speaking only in the Holy Tongue. Once he came to Reb Yehoshua Leib to ask a question. He began to say his question in the Holy Tongue, when Reb Yehoshua Leib interrupted him with a rebuke: “Get out of my house! For all the days of our exile, Yiddish will be spoken!” Then he added, “The Jews in Germany, fearing that if they spoke the gentile language they would assimilate, chose a dialect of German spoken by peasants and made it their national language, to serve as a barrier between them and the gentiles. This is how our Yiddish was born. If this language was the barrier to assimilation, it is itself the Holy Tongue!” (Mara D’ara Yisroel, v. 2 p. 95)

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