

Ki Mitzion: Parashat Va'era

Translated by: Jeremy Tibbetts

Edited by: Raphael BenLevi

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Please submit all comments and feedback to jtibbetts94@gmail.com

The Purpose of the Exodus from Egypt

Reflecting on the structure of the book of Shemot allows us to answer a fundamental question for the Jewish nation in our time, which is: what was the purpose of the exodus from Egypt? Was the goal our arrival at Mount Sinai and receiving the Torah through the Ten Commandments, or rather entrance into the land of Yisrael as promised to our forefathers?

There are eleven *parshiyot* in the book of Shemot. The first six, from *parashat* Shemot through *parashat* Mishpatim, are called the *parshiyot* of “*Shovavim*”¹ after the verse in Yirmiyahu “return my wayward (*shovavim*) sons” (3:22). These *parshiyot* tell about the series of events that take place in the Egyptian exodus, and how this exodus became difficult as a result of the opposition from Pharaoh, from the Egyptian nation, and even from the majority of the Hebrews themselves.

The five remaining *parshiyot* are dedicated completely to the building of the *Mishkan*, which is the model and precursor for the Temple in Yerushalayim.

It seems that this ordering indicates that in the divine plan for fulfilling Hashem’s promise, the final culmination of the exile in Egypt is the building of the Temple in Yerushalayim.

The forty years of wandering in the desert, with the revelation at Mount Sinai and all the subsequent events, are all the result of mere circumstance which only serve to delay the execution of the original plan.

This is described clearly in the Torah, particularly in chapter 13, verse 17: “When Pharaoh let the people leave, God did not lead them along the Philistine Highway, although it was the shorter route. God’s consideration was that if the people encountered armed resistance, they would lose heart and return to Egypt. God therefore made the people take a roundabout path, by way of the desert...”

The reason for this “making them take” a roundabout path is said explicitly: “the people”² that left Egypt together with Bnei Yisrael were liable to return to the house of bondage out of a fear of the hardships involved in entering the land of the Hebrews.

¹ *Shovavim* is an acronym for the six *parshiyot* **Shemot**, **Vayera**, **Bo**, **Beshalach**, **Yitro**, **Mishpatim**.

² Meaning the *erev rav*.

The event of the revelation at Sinai itself is explained in the Torah as needed to set in stone the status of Moshe as the prophet of God sent out for Yisrael.³

In fact, already at the beginning of *parashat Va'era*, the divine plan for Israel is detailed:

“Therefore say to the Israelites [in My name], ‘I am God. I will **take you away** from your forced labor in Egypt and **free you** from their slavery. I will **liberate** you with a demonstration of My power, and with great acts of judgment. I will **take you** to Myself as a nation, and I will be to you as a God. You will know that I am God your Lord, the One who is bringing you out from under the Egyptian subjugation. I will **bring you** to the land regarding which I raised My hand, [swearing] that I would give it to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. I will give it to you as an inheritance. I am God’” (6:6-8).

This five-stage plan (I will **take you away**... **and free you** etc.), does not reference the revelation at Sinai. However, *post factum*, it is easy to connect it to what is said in verse 7: “I will take you to Myself as a nation.”

R. Haim ben Attar, the “Ohr HaChaim,” asks an important question about this:⁴ We have here five promises from God which are said to Bnei Yisrael through Moshe. It seems that only four of these promises were fulfilled in the generation that left Egypt. The fifth promise, “I will bring you to the land” will be fulfilled only in the following generation, that of their children. How is this to be understood, since according to Chazal we are speaking not only about promises but about actual oaths?⁵

The Ohr HaChaim explains that for this reason there was an explicit condition regarding the fifth promise: “You will know that I am God your Lord, the One who is bringing you out from under the Egyptian subjugation. I will bring you to the land...”

We see here that the generation of the desert, even though it received the Torah at Mount Sinai, did not understand that Hashem was the one who brought them out of the land of Egypt in order to return them to the land of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov!⁶

This explanation brings into sharp focus one of the most difficult contradictions of our time. That is, the position of Jews who are “religious” but are not involved in the state of Yisrael, because they are not willing to understand that the One who has put an end to the exile is Hashem himself in all this glory. They oppose the “Zionist state” in the same way that their ancestors from the generation of the desert opposed Moshe.

³ “God said to Moshe, ‘I will come back to you in a thick cloud, so that all the people will hear when I speak to you. They will then believe in you forever’” (Shemot 19:9).

⁴ See his commentary on Shemot 6:8

⁵ “Therefore” is a phrase for swearing an oath. See Rashi there.

⁶ See Shemot 32:1: “Moses, the man who brought us out of Egypt.”