



ALSHICH

INSIGHTS FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE

ספר שמות

פרשת שמות

SERIES 2: ISSUE 13

EGYPT'S REACTION TO THE GROWTH OF BNEI YISRAEL

Chapter 1

8) *A new king came to power over Egypt who had not known Yosef.*

ח) וַיָּקָם מֶלֶךְ-חָדָשׁ עַל-מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַע אֶת-יוֹסֵף.

9) *He said to his people, "Look! The people, Bnei Yisrael are greater and stronger than us.*

ט) וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-עַמּוֹ הַזֶּה עַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ.

10) *Come, let us act wisely toward him (i.e., Bnei Yisrael) in case he becomes numerous, and if war breaks out, he will also be added to our enemies. He will then fight against us and go up out of the land."*

י) הֲבֵה נִתְחַכְמָה לוֹ פְּוִי-רִבָּה וְהָיָה כִּי-תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם-הוּא עַל-שֹׁנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם-בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִרְהָאָרֶץ.

Consider the following questions:

1. Why are the Jewish people always referred to here in the singular form, as "he" and "him" instead of "they" and "them"?
2. In verse 10, if it is still Pharaoh speaking to the Egyptians, why does he say הֲבֵה ("Come") in the singular, as if he is talking to one person? He should have said הָבוּ in the plural form, since he was addressing a large number of people.
3. Why is the concern expressed in verse 10: "in case he (the Jewish people) becomes numerous"? They had already become numerous, as the Torah said in verse 7, *Bnei Yisrael ... became numerous.*
4. Why does the Torah not record the Egyptian people's answer to Pharaoh's proposal?
5. Why were the Egyptians only afraid of the threat posed by the Jewish people if war would break out?
6. Why was the Egyptians' greatest concern that the Jewish people would *go up out of the land*? Would it not have been worse if they stayed in the land and used their numbers to overcome the Egyptians there?

Pharaoh realized that the Jewish people in Egypt had all the attributes necessary for one nation to defeat another and sought to warn the Egyptians about this. These are: (1) being united; (2) being assisted by Divine Providence in a way that supersedes the natural order; and (3) being physically bigger and stronger than their opponents.

He therefore told the Egyptians as follows:

(1) *Look! The people.* The word **עַם**, in the singular – meaning people (in the sense of "nation") – indicates that they were unified.

(2) *Bnei Yisrael.* Referring to the Jewish people as "Bnei Yisrael" indicates that Pharaoh saw that they were

assisted in a supernatural way by Divine Providence. The Egyptians knew that Yisrael, the father of the Jewish nation, was aided by Hashem because the famine ceased when he came down to Egypt (as it says in *Bereishis Rabbah* 89:9). Furthermore, when he entered Pharaoh's palace, the lintel miraculously rose up so that Yaakov could enter the palace without lowering his head before the idol that was placed opposite the entrance (to force people to bow to it). It was so obvious that the Divine Providence favored Yaakov that he was afraid that if he were to be buried in Egypt the Egyptians would use the burial site for some kind of idol worship (Rashi on *Bereishis* 47:29).

(3) *Are greater and stronger than us.* This refers to Bnei Yisrael being physically greater and stronger.

Throughout his speech to his people, Pharaoh used the singular form to refer to the Jewish people. By doing so, he emphasized that being unified is the most important of the qualities necessary for one nation to overcome another. **[This answers Question 1.]** His intention throughout was to warn the Egyptians that they needed to take precautions to prevent the Jewish people from rising up against them and killing them or ruling over them.

We asked above why Pharaoh used the singular Hebrew form of the word *הָבֵה* (“Come”) in verse 10 when addressing the Egyptians. The answer is that it was not Pharaoh who was speaking to the Egyptians in this verse. Rather, it was they who were speaking to him (a single individual), in response to his warning. This also answers why the Torah does not seem to record the Egyptians' answer to Pharaoh's warning. According to what we have explained, verse 10 contains their answer to him. The literal meaning of the word *הָבֵה* is “give”. Thus, in the phrase *לוּ הָבֵה נְתַתְּנָמָה*, the people are saying to Pharaoh: “Give us of your strength and let us act wisely toward him [the Jewish people].” **[This answers Questions 2 and 4.]**

And what exactly do they want to act wisely about? The continuation of the verse says, “*in case he becomes numerous.*” The Egyptians informed Pharaoh that their only concern was that the Jewish people might become more numerous than they were already. There was no need to worry about the Jewish people being united or having special Divine Providence. **[This answers Question 3.]** Furthermore, as long as the Jewish people remained within the borders of Egypt, they need not be feared at all. This is because the *mazal* (guardian angel) that held sway in Egypt guaranteed that no slave could attain rulership there. But if they multiplied too much and then *war breaks out*, they said, “Bnei Yisrael's numbers will embolden them to join our enemies and fight against us from within. We may then feel so threatened by this dual attack, from without and within, that we will let them leave the land — and if we do that, they will be free of the power of our *mazal*, and they may then overcome us and rule over us.” This is why they emphasized to Pharaoh that the key factor was to make sure that the Jewish people did not *go up out of the land*. **[This answers Questions 5 and 6.]**

THE ALSHICH AND HIS COMMENTARY

The Alshich (1508 - 1600), was one of only five famous rabbis in Jewish history universally known by the title “HaKodosh” (the Holy one). He served on the same Beis Din as Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Shulchan Aruch. He simultaneously focuses on both the text as well as the context of a series of verses by listing a range of questions and then answering them all using one or two concepts.

These sheets are drawn from the Alshich on the Torah published by Feldheim and are in memory of Yental Bas Yitzchok, Mrs Jean Silkin. They seek to expand the spectrum of readers who can appreciate the Alshich's true greatness.

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