

פרשת שמות

Parshas Sh'mos, indeed Sefer Sh'mos, has a beginning that seems to be non-essential and even superfluous.

We read (Perek 1/P'sukim 1-5):

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הַבָּאִים מִצְרָיִם אֶת יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ וּבֵיתוֹ בָּאוּ: רְאוּבֵן שְׁמֵעוֹן לֵוִי וְיְהוּדָה: יִשְׁשָׁכָר זְבוּלֹן וּבִנְיָמִן: דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי גָד וְאַשֶׁר: וַיְהִי כָּל נַפְשׁ יֹצְאֵי יִרְךָ יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נַפְשׁ וַיֹּסֶף הָיָה בְּמִצְרַיִם:

These are the names of the sons of Yisroel who are coming to Egypt with Yaakov; each man and his household came. Reuven, Shimon, Levi and Yehuda. Yissochor, Zevulun and Binyamin. Dan and Naftali, Gad and Asher. All of the souls of those who came from the side of Yaakov were seventy souls; and Yosef was in Egypt.

If we did not know that it was the Torah speaking, we would likely say, 'nothing new here'.

All of the information in these sections has been given to us already. In Parshas Vayetze we learned of the birth of the first eleven sons of Yaakov Ovinu and that list was completed with the birth of Binyamin about which we were taught in Parshas Vayishlach.

In Parshas Vayigash we had a comprehensive list of all those who made up the seventy lives and we have learned already, and with great elaboration, beginning with Parshas Vayeshev that Yosef was in Egypt.

Doesn't it truly appear that 'there is nothing new here'?

Ramban certainly does not need us to raise this question and he preempts us and writes:

טעם ואלה שמות - כי הכתוב ירצה למנות ענין הגלות מעת רדתם למצרים, כי אז גלו בראש גולים, כאשר פירשתי, ולפיכך יחזור אל תחלת הענין שהוא מפסוק וכל זרעו הביא אתו מצרימה (בראשית מו/ז), ושם כתוב אחריו ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה וגו', ואותו הפסוק בעצמו הוא שהחזיר בכאן, כי אף על פי שהם שני ספרים, הספור מחובר בדברים באים זה אחר זה, וכאשר הזכיר בני יעקב קצר בבני בניו וכל

זרעו, והחזיר הכלל כאשר אמר שם (שם כז¹) כל הנפש לבית יעקב הבאה מצרימה שבעים.

The reason for writing 'And these are the names' – This is because the Torah wishes to note the matter of the exile from the time of their going down to Egypt because that was the first of the exiles as I explained there. Therefore the Torah returns to the beginning of the matter, which is the verse 'all of his seed he brought to Egypt' and there it wrote in the following verse, 'These are the names of B'nei Yisroel who were coming to Egypt, etc.' It is that very verse that it repeats here². Even though B'reishis and Sh'mos are two separate books, the story is connected with the matters coming one after the other as here it lists the children of Yaakov but shortens [and does not mention] Yaakov's grandchildren and all of his seed. The Torah repeats the general event as it is written there, 'all the souls of the House of Yaakov who came to Egypt were seventy.

There is a repetition, Ramban states, and the repetition is deliberate as it comes to combine the episodes of Sefer B'reishis with those of Sefer Sh'mos.

¹ The entire Posuk reads:

וּבְנֵי יוֹסֵף אֲשֶׁר יָלְדוּ לוֹ בְּמִצְרַיִם נֶפֶשׁ שְׁנַיִם כָּל הַנְּפֹשׁ לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב הַבָּאָה מִצְרִימָה שִׁבְעִים:

The sons of Yosef who were born to him in Egypt were two souls; all of the souls of the House of Yaakov that came to Egypt were seventy.

² The repetition of the verse is not the sole indication that the Torah is returning to its earlier point and continuing from there.

But, perhaps the most indicative part of the repetition of the verse is that the repetition is 'inaccurate'.

That is to say, when the Posuk was first written it was describing the descent of Yaakov Ovinu and his entourage to Egypt in 'real time' – while the descent was occurring. Thus, the use of the word הַבָּאִים, that *are coming*, is apt because the process of *coming* was occurring at that moment.

However, at the beginning of Sh'mos when the descent to Egypt occurred many decades earlier, it would have been more precise to write אֲשֶׁר בָּאוּ, who *came*. The fact that the verse repeats itself with exactitude, including the word הַבָּאִים, teaches us that the Torah is returning us to that earlier period in time.

Rashi understands the opening verses of Sefer Sh'mos differently than did the Ramban. He acknowledges that those verses are unnecessary as far as teaching us a history lesson. We are quite aware of the history.

Rather, the Torah wishes to teach us a different lesson, a lesson regarding the relationship of HaKodosh Boruch Hu and Israel.

Rashi writes at the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos:

ואלה שמות בני ישראל - אף על פי שמנאן בחייהן בשמותן, חזר ומנאן במיתתן,
להודיע חבתן שנמשלו לכוכבים, שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר ובשמותם, שנאמר
(ישעיהו מ/כו³) המוציא במספר צבאם לכולם בשם יקרא:

These are the names of B'nei Yisroel – Even though He counted them during their lifetime and by name, He again counted them at their death to let it be known that Israel is compared to the stars. Hashem takes them out by their number and by name as it says, 'He takes out their hosts by number; He calls them all by name.

That is, explains Rashi, whenever G-d moves the stars, He gives them special attention and mention. They are noted as a unit – with their number and they are recognized individually because each has a name.

Israel is no less than the stars and it, too, is noted as a unit with a total number, in this case the seventy people who came to Egypt. But, the number doesn't suffice. Each is recognized as an individual. In Parshas Vayigash in Sefer B'reishis, the names of all seventy were listed. Here, at the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos, the Torah found it sufficient to mention the names of Yaakov and his sons alone.

However, it remains to be discussed, and it must be discussed – what is the necessity to compare Israel to the stars. Why not say that G-d's Providence is with

³ The entire verse reads:

שָׂאוּ מְרוֹם עֵינֵיכֶם וּרְאוּ מִי בָרָא אֱלֹהֵי הַמּוֹצִיא בַּמִּסְפָּר צְבָאָם לְכֻלָּם בְּשֵׁם יִקְרָא מְרַב אוֹנִים וְאַמִּיץ כֹּחַ
אִישׁ לֹא נֶעְדָּר:

Raise your eyes above and see, Who created all of this? He Who takes out their hosts by number and to all of them He calls by name; with an abundance of force and powerful strength; no one will be missing.

them all of the time? Why should I need a *moshol* of stars? Why doesn't the Midrash talk directly about Israel?

And, we should add – what does it mean to count the starts and to mention them by names?

S'fas Emes to our Parsha (5634) deals with these questions and explains:

ברש"י שנמשלו לכוכבים שמוציאן ומכניסן במספר כו'. והיא גופא קשיא למה מוציאן ומכניסן במספר. אך כי כל כוכב מושל על הארה מיוחדת אליו. ונקרא לו שם על ענין פקודתו. וכשעושה פעולתו ניתוסף לו שם חדש. והוא רמז לבני ישראל שנמשלו גם כן לכוכבים כי נשמות בני ישראל מאירין בעולם הזה בהחשיכה כדכתיב (משלי ב/כז⁴) נר ה' נשמת אדם. ויש לכל אחת הארה מיוחדת. וכשזוכה להאיר בעולם. ולמשוך כל עינים שעוסק בעולם הזה לנקודה הקדושה שיש בו. אז משיג הארה חדשה וניתוסף לו שם חדש כנ"ל.

Rashi writes that Israel were compared to stars that Hashem takes them out and brings them in by number etc. – this itself is difficult. Why does Hashem take the stars out and bring them in by number [and by name]?

But [the answer is], each star rules over a particular shining light that is unique to it. The star is given a name based on its task. When the star fulfills its task in has a new name added to it.

This is a hint regarding B'nei Yisroel who are also compared to the stars. This is because the souls of B'nei Yisroel shine out light in this world that is dark. This is as it is written, 'The candle of Hashem is the soul of man.' Each soul of B'nei Yisroel has a shining light that is unique to it.

When the soul merits to shed light in the world and to draw the various matters of *Olom Haze*h to the holy point where sanctity is found within the *Olom Haze*h-matter, then the soul receives a new shining light and a new name is added on to it.

If we analyze these words of *S'fas Emes* we realize that the 'names' under discussion here are not the names that are given one at birth. These are different

⁴ The entire verse reads:

נר ה' נשמת אדם הִפֵּשׂ כָּל חֲדָרָי בְּטֶן:

The candle of Hashem is the soul of man; it searches all the chambers inside him.

types of names than can be expanded upon, or perhaps contracted, and they are measure of the individual's spiritual attainments.

In fact, we have a precedent for these type of names, a precedent that we learned in Parshas Vayishlach. When Yaakov Ovinu struggled with the angel, he inquired about the name of the *mal'ach* as we read (B'reishis Perek 32/Posuk 30):

וַיִּשְׁאַל יַעֲקֹב וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּידָה נָא שְׁמֶךָ וַיֹּאמֶר לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשְׁמִי וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתוֹ שָׁם:

Yaakov asked and he said, 'Tell me, please, your name;' he said, 'Why do you ask for my name;' he blessed him there.

Rashi writes:

למה זה תשאל - אין לנו שם קבוע, משתנין שמותינו, הכל לפי מצות עבודת השליחות שאנו משתלחים:

Why do you ask – We have no fixed name; our names change. Our name is always according to the command of the Divine mission to which we are sent.

We read similarly in Sefer Shoftim (Perek 13/P'sukim 17-18) regarding Manoach and the angel that was sent to announce the birth of Shimshon:

וַיֹּאמֶר מְנוּחַ אֶל מַלְאָךְ ה' מִי שְׁמֶךָ כִּי יבֹא דְבָרְךָ וְכִבְדִּנְךָ: וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ מַלְאָךְ ה' לָמָּה זֶה תִּשְׁאַל לְשְׁמִי וְהוּא פְּלִאי:

Manoach said to the angel of G-d, 'What is your name – so that when your words is fulfilled we can honor you.' The angel of G-d said to him, 'Why do you ask my name? It is wondrous.'

Rashi writes there:

והוא פלאי - מכוסה תמיד הוא משתנה...

It is wondrous – It is covered. It changes always...

That is, the word פלאי, which does mean 'wondrous' comes from a base word that means 'covered' – because things that are wondrous seem to be inexplicable; their explanation is 'covered'.

Alshich HaKodosh gives a different explanation – but that explanation does not veer from the basic premise that Rashi teaches. He writes:

ויאמר לו מלאך ה' למה זה כו'... והנכון באמת הוא מאמר חז"ל במדרש רבה (עיין בראשית רבה עח/ד) שאמרו כי לפי פעולת המלאך משתנה שמו. ולכן עתה שבאתי על עסק נזירות שנאמר בו (במדבר ו/ב⁵) איש כי יפליא כו', אני נקרא פלאי:

The angel of G-d said to him, 'Why do you ask' – the correct explanation is based on what it says in the Midrash B'midbar Rabba where Chazal say that according to the activities of the angel, his name changes.

'Therefore, [the angel said] 'Now, I am coming to deal with the matter of *nezirus* and it says in regards to *nezirus* יפליא איש כי יפליא – that is the *neder* of *nezirus* is expressed a יפליא and thus I am called פלאי as an indication of the mission that I am undertaking.

Alshich HaKodosh argues regarding the precise meaning of פלאי in our context. He does not dispute the principle that an angel has no 'personal name'.

The stars that Rashi discusses also have no 'personal name' according to S'fas Emes. They are somewhat like the angels in that their 'personal profile' is of little consequence. It is that which they do that has import and impact. Their names are enhanced and expanded when they fulfil their tasks because then they ascend to a higher level.

People are like stars to the extent that have 'names' that are assigned to them when they fulfil the tasks that are put upon them. That is, in addition to the permanent names that each of us has, there are attributed names that reflect our fulfilment of our Divine mission⁶.

Our permanent names are unchanging, in general. The assigned names, with their various mutations, are variable by definition.

⁵ The entire verse reads:

דַּבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אוֹ אִשָּׁה כִּי יִפְלֵא לְנָדָר נָדָר נָזִיר לְהִזִּיר לָהּ:
Speak to B'nei Yisroel and you shall say to them: 'a man or a woman who will make a vow of a *nazir* to separate himself to Hashem.

⁶ S'fas Emes does not explain why it is necessary to have numbers as well as names. Perhaps, the names refer to the individual achievements whereas the numbers refer to the achievements of the collective, of the *klal*.

The need to compare us to the stars comes to explain the effect of our fulfillment of our spiritual duty. Just like the stars share light, we do the same when we successfully complete the mission that we have.

This is the introduction to this second of the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*. The question is, though, why did the Torah choose to teach us this lesson at this point? Why did the Torah choose the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos to let us know of this mission of B'nei Yisroel that brings them favor before G-d when they live up to their expectations – expectations that they are capable of enlightening the world? Why couldn't we have been told this earlier, in Sefer B'reishis, when all those who came to Egypt were listed, one by one?

Of course, one would respond that we are told that they were numbered and named upon their entry – at birth *and* upon their exit – at death, and thus this 'naming' must be repeated here in Sefer Sh'mos when they 'exited' this world.

Nonetheless, we can still ask this question. Aside from the death of Yosef, the demise of his brothers is never mentioned with specification.

At the end of Sefer B'reishis we are told that Yosef died. That is how the Sefer concludes (Perek 50/Posuk 26):

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בֶּן מֵאָה וָעֶשְׂרִים שָׁנַיִם וַיַּחַנְטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשֶׂם בְּאֶרֶן בְּמִצְרַיִם:

Yosef died at the age of 110 years and they prepared him and placed him a coffin in Egypt.

In our Parshas Sh'mos, that event is recapped with the death of the brothers being attached to the death of Yosef. And so we read early in our Parsha (Perek 1/Posuk 6):

וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף וְכָל אָחָיו וְכָל הַדּוֹר הַהוּא:

Yosef died, and all of his brothers, and all of that generation.

It is apparent that this is only a review of what has occurred and thus it could have been written at the end of Sefer B'reishis when the era of the *Ovos* and the *Shevatim* has concluded.

Why was this message of names and numbers chosen to open Sefer Sh'mos, Sefer HaGeula-the Book of Redemption, as Ramban teaches?

In fact, this opening to Sefer Sh'mos which seems so promising stands in stark contrast to that which the Torah continues to reveal.

The concluding verse (Posuk 7) of the introductory verses reads:

וּבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל פָּרוּ וַיִּשְׂרְצוּ וַיִּרְבוּ וַיַּעֲצְמוּ בְּמֵאדָּ מְאֹד וַתִּמְלֵא הָאָרֶץ אֹתָם:

B'nei Yisroel were fruitful and they spread out and they increased and they became very, very powerful and the land was filled with them.

It does seem that their numbers are increasing and we would not think it to be in error to also assume that the names that are associated with those numbers were also increasing because of their accomplishments.

But there is an abrupt change in the tenor of the verses that follow that seem to be diametrically opposed to the theme that Rashi teaches us that opens Sefer Sh'mos.

We read (P'sukim 8-16):

וַיִּקָּם מֶלֶךְ חָדָשׁ עַל מִצְרַיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדַע אֶת יוֹסֵף: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל עַמּוֹ הֲיֵה עִם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל רַב וְעָצוּם מִמֶּנּוּ: הֲבֵה נִתְחַכְמָה לּוֹ פֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְהָיָה כִּי תִקְרָאנָה מִלְחָמָה וְנוֹסֵף גַּם הוּא עַל שְׂנְאֵינוּ וְנִלְחַם בָּנוּ וְעָלָה מִן הָאָרֶץ: וַיִּשְׂמִימוּ עָלָיו שָׂרֵי מִסִּים לְמַעַן עַנּוֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלַתָם וַיִּבְנוּ עָרֵי מִסְכְּנוֹת לְפָרְעָה אֶת פִּתֹם וְאֶת רַעַמְסֵס: וְכֹאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וַיִּקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִצְרַיִם אֶת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּפָרָה: וַיִּמְרְרוּ אֶת חַיֵּיהֶם בְּעִבְדָּה קָשָׁה בְּחֹמֶר וּבִלְבָנִים וּבְכָל עֲבֹדָה בְּשֹׂדֵה אֶת כָּל עֲבֹדָתָם אֲשֶׁר עָבְדוּ בָהֶם בְּפָרָה: וַיֹּאמֶר מֶלֶךְ מִצְרַיִם לְמִילֻדַת הָעִבְרִיִּית אֲשֶׁר שָׂם הָאֱחָת שִׁפְרָה וְשָׂם הַשְּׂנִיית פֹּעָה: וַיֹּאמֶר בְּלִדְכֶן אֶת הָעִבְרִיִּיִּים וְרָאִיתֶן עַל הָאֲבָנִים אִם בֵּן הוּא וְהִמְתַּן אֹתוֹ וְאִם בַּת הוּא וְחָיָה:

A new king arose over Egypt; he did not know Yosef. He said to his people, 'Behold the nation of B'nei Yisroel are more than us and more powerful than us. Let us deal wisely with them lest they will increase and when there will be a war they will join our enemies and fight us and go up from the land. They placed upon them tax officers in order to afflict them with their burdens; the people built storehouses for Par'o –*Pisom* and *Ra'am'ses*. As they afflicted them so did they increase and spread out; the Egyptians were irritated by B'nei Yisroel. Egypt made B'nei Yisroel work with back-breaking labor. The Egyptians embittered the lives of B'nei Yisroel with hard work with clay and with bricks and with all of the work in the field – all of their work - they worked them with back-breaking labor. The King of Egypt said

to the Hebrew midwives, the name of one was Shifra and the name of the second was Puah. He said, 'When you birth the Hebrew women and see them upon the birthing stone, if it is a son you shall kill him and if it as daughter – she will live.

The contrast is stark and if we are seeking the reason why the Torah informed us of the parable of stars at the beginning of Sefer Sh'mos, not earlier at the conclusion of Sefer B'reishis, then the answer to that question may be found in the contrast that we see at the beginning of this Sefer.

The compendium, *Maayana Shel Torah*⁷, brings the Midrash Tanchuma to our Posuk:

ותמלא הארץ אותם. שנתמלאו בתי טרטיאות ובתי קרקסיות מהם

The land was filled with them – Their theaters and circuses were filled with them.

That is, in contrast to the reading of the verse that implies that the population of our ancestors burgeoned and thus 'the land was filled with them', the Midrash reads this phrase differently.

There are two things that this verse teaches. First, there were many births. Second, B'nei Yisroel populated the centers of Egyptian entertainment. Those entertainment centers were devoted to gladiator-type fighting and performances that extolled idolatry and immorality.

As the population of B'nei Yisroel grew and as time passed, our ancestors place in the cultural events of Egypt became prominent.

And the comment of *Maayana Shel Torah* to this Midrash reads:

כל כמה שהיהודים חותרים לחזור לעולם התרבות של הגויים- כך מתגברת יותר שנאת הגויים כלפיהם והם ממצייאים חוקים שונים לבודד את היהודי ולהתרחק ממנו.

As long as Jews push themselves to return to the world of non-Jewish culture, so does the hatred of the non-Jews against them increase. The non-Jews

⁷ This is a Hebrew edition of an earlier Yiddish work by the name of דער תורה קוואל which means The Wellspring of Torah.

promulgated various laws to isolate the Jew and to distance themselves from him.

That is, the Midrash connects the phrase *'the land was filled with them'* with the succeeding verses that teach about the viciousness of the Egyptians.

In his Sefer *הדרוש והעיון* which was published in 1938 immediately before the outbreak of World War II, the Gaon Rav Zalman Sorotzkin ZT"L, who lost almost his entire family under the Nazis *שמם וזכרם* writes regarding the beginning of the introductory verses of Parshas Sh'mos:

איש וביתו באו-דרכו של עולם כאשר אדם עוקר עיירה קטנה ספוגה תורה ויראת שמים אל כרך גדול שטוף הפקרות והבלי הזמן –הרי הוא עצמו מנעוריו נתחנך ונתגדל בדרך היהדות, עודנו ממשיך לשמור תורה ומצוות כבתחילה; ואילו ילדיו מסתגלים קימעה לחיי ההפקר של הכרך עד שלבסוף הם סרים מדרך היהדות. לפיכך באה התורה להודיענו כי אצל בני יעקב לא היו דברים כך. בבואם מעבר הנהר. מסביבה של אמונה ויראת שמים למצרים הטמאה והאלילית נשארו בכל זאת 'איש וביתו'. לא חל כל שינוי בבית והבנים הלכו בעקבות אבותיהם תוך התאמה מלאה.

Each man and his household came – The way of the world is that when a person uproots himself for a small town that was suffused with Torah learning and *yiras Shamayim* and moves to a large city that was suffused with immorality and the valueless activities of its times – he himself who was educated and raised according to Jewish practice will continue to observe Torah and its Mitzvos as he did in the past.

However, his children slowly become accustomed to the immorality of the large city and at the end turn away from the path of Judaism.

It is for that purpose that the Torah comes and informs us that regarding the children of Yaakov it was not so.

When they came from the other side of the sea, from an environment of faith and fear of heaven to the defiled and idolatrous Egypt, they nevertheless remained 'each man with his household'. There was no change in the house and with its sons and they continued to follow the footsteps of their fathers completely.

Thus, the Torah begins its narrative about our ancestors with the parable of the stars. Yaakov and his immediate descendants did remain loyal to Torah and to its teaching. They deserved to be constantly remembered by name and by number as they continued to shed their light that was a lone beacon in a world of almost absolute darkness.

However, that heroic dedication to the ideals of their forefathers that marked the early years of our ancestors in Egypt, as taught by Rav Sorotzkin, gave way to the marked change that occurred in later generations when the distinction between Israel and the nations was slowly eaten away.

At that time, as the Midrash teaches, there was a pushback from the Egyptians who, as much as they despised us when we were separate and distinct, wanted us away from them even more if we became closer to them.

We do not forget the verse in Parshas Miketz that teaches us of Egyptian protocol when Yosef as *Tzofnas Pa'neach* hosted his brothers for a meal. We read (B'reishis Perek 43/Posuk 32):

וַיִּשְׂמוּ לוֹ לְבַדּוֹ וְלָהֶם לְבַדָּם וְלַמִּצְרַיִם הָאֲכָלִים אֶתֹו לְבַדָּם כִּי לֹא יוֹכְלוּן הַמִּצְרַיִם לֶאֱכֹל
אֶת הָעֵבְרִים לְחֶם כִּי תוֹעֵבָה הוּא לַמִּצְרַיִם:

They placed Yosef by himself and the brothers by themselves and the Egyptians who ate with Tzofnas Pa'neach by themselves because the Egyptians were unable to bread with the Hebrews because such was abominable to Egypt.

Perhaps, then, all is lost for our ancestors – and for us as well. If the events are spiraling downward, out of control, they have a force that cannot be stopped. All is destined to be lost.

In fact, that is what is implied, according to S'fas Emes (ibid.) in the verse that we saw above.

We read:

וְכַאֲשֶׁר יַעֲנוּ אֹתוֹ כֵּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֵן יִפְרֹץ וְיִקְצוּ מִפְּנֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

As they afflicted them so did they increase and spread out and the Egyptians were irritated by B'nei Yisroel.

Rashi writes:

וכאשר יענו אתו - בכל מה שהם נותנין לב לענות, כן לב הקדוש ברוך הוא להרבות ולהפריץ:

As they afflicted them - as much as the Egyptians intended to afflict, so Hashem's intention was to increase their numbers and let them spread out.

If we read the verse carefully, and then add Rashi's commentary to it, we come to the following conclusion:

Hashem did not prevent the Egyptians from persecuting our ancestors. They persecuted and He did not intervene.

What did He do? Hashem thwarted the goals of the Egyptians. The Egyptians wished to decimate our ancestors, limiting their numbers by imposing terribly harsh conditions upon them, that goal was prevented by Hashem.

And why was that so? This is the explanation that S'fas Emes presents:

וכאשר יענו כו' כן ירבה כו'. איתא בזוהר הקדוש כי גלות מצרים ועבודה הקשה היו לטובה כדי שלא יתערבו בני ישראל באומות עיין שם. וכמו כן הפך לבם לשנוא עמו. שנותנים על זה שבח והודיה שנעשו שונאים לבני ישראל. וגם המצריים לא רצו להיות שונאים כי ידעו זה גם כן וזה שנאמר בפרך - בפה רך כו' רק השם יתברך הפך לבם וכמו (בראשית כה/כג) ולאום מלאום יאמץ. פירוש על ידי שנאתם בני ישראל מתרחקין מהם וכפי הריחוק כן ניתוסף להם כח:

As they afflicted etc. so did they increase etc. – It is found in the Holy Zohar that the Egyptian exile and the hard labor were for good in order that B'nei Yisroel would not mix with the nations. See the Zohar.

Similarly, Hashem turned the hearts of the Egyptians to hate His People and we praise G-d and thank Him for this that they became the enemies of Israel. The Egyptians themselves did not want to be Israel's enemies since they knew this as well [that such would limit their ability to influence them] and thus it says that the word *b'forech*, meaning back-breaking labor could be read as *b'feh rach*, with a 'gentle tongue'⁸.

⁸ We read in Midrash Sh'mos Rabba (Parshata 1):

ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך, רבי אליעזר אמר בפה רך

Thus, it was G-d Who turned their hearts. And this is in consonance with the verse, 'one nation will be stronger than the other'⁹. The meaning of that verse is that their hatred of Israel will distance the nations from them. The strength of Israel corresponds proportionally with their distance from the nations.

In addition to the uniqueness of this explanation of S'fas Emes, its implications seems to be quite harrowing.

Israel was placed on a pedestal as it entered Egypt. Its power was great. It could shed light upon the world and thus merit unique attention and blessings from the Ribbono Shel Olom.

However, that promising future, says S'fas Emes, was not fulfilled. Israel did not fulfill its task and thus harsh and extreme intervention by HaKodosh Boruch Hu was the only means by which Israel would have a future.

However, there is an additional approach that gives us a modicum of hope.

The Midrash (Pesikta Zutrasa to Parshas Voera Posuk 6) teaches us a famous lesson, but from a connection that may not be so well-known.

The Egyptians forced Israel to work with porach – Rabbi Eliezer said – with a gentle tongue –peh rach..

The well-known explanation of this interpretation is that, in fact, Israel was worked harshly from the beginning. However, the tactics that the Egyptians employed to begin the servitude were gentle, with the goal being the back-breaking labor.

S'fas Emes teaches a different explanation. The original thought of the Egyptians was to treat Israel well – with a 'gentle tongue'. It was Divine intervention that changed their mind to deal with Israel in a terribly harsh manner.

⁹ We read the explanation given to Rivka I'meinu regarding the nature of her pregnancy:

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' לָהּ שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנָהּ וּשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיהָ יִפְרְדוּ וּלְאֵם מְלֵאָם יֶאֱמָץ וְרַב יַעֲבֹד צָעִיר:
Hashem said to Rivka, 'There are two nations in your stomach and two nations will separate from your insides; one nation will be stronger than the other and the older will serve the younger.'

The Midrash discusses the verses in next week's Parshas Voera that list the *לוּלָהּ* – the four expressions that Hashem used to promise the redemption from Egypt.

The P'sukim (Sh'mos Perek 6/P'sukim 6-7) read:

לֵךְ אָמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי ה' וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מֵעֲבֹדָתָם וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּזְרוּעַ נְטוּיָהּ וּבְשִׁפְטִים גְּדֹלִים: וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם לִי לְעָם וְהֵייתִי לְכֶם לֹא...לְקִיּוֹם וַיִּדְעוּתֶם כִּי אֲנִי ה' אֵל...לְקִיּוֹם הַמוֹצֵיא אֶתְכֶם מִתַּחַת סִבְלוֹת מִצְרַיִם:

Therefore say to B'nei Yisroel, 'I am Hashem; I will take you out from under the suffering of Egypt and I will save you from their labor; I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments [against the Egyptians]. I will take you for Me as a nation and I will be your G-d and you will know that I am Hashem your G-d Who takes you out from under the suffering of Egypt.

The Midrash teaches that each of these four expressions of Redemption, signifying an ever-enhanced level of salvation is in response to the actions of Israel. We read:

וְהוֹצֵאתִי אֶתְכֶם, וְהִצַּלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם, וְגֵאלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם, וְלִקְחֹתִי אֶתְכֶם, כִּנְגַד אַרְבַּע זְכוּיֹת שְׂבִידִם, שֶׁלֹּא שִׁינּוּ אֶת לְשׁוֹנָם, וְלֹא חִילְפוּ אֶת שְׂמֹלוֹתָם, וְלֹא גִילוּ אֶת סוּדָם, דְּכַתִּיב וְשָׂאֵלָה אִשָּׁה מִשְׁכַּנְתָּהּ (שְׂמוֹת ג/כב¹⁰), וְלֹא בָטְלוּ בְרִית מִיֵּלָה.

I will take you out, I will save you; I will redeem you, I will take you – Each of these expressions are for each of the four merits that they possessed: they did not change their language; they did not change their dress; they did not reveal their secret as it is written, 'a woman will borrow from her neighbor'; and they did not stop circumcision¹¹.

¹⁰ The entire verse reads:

וְשָׂאֵלָה אִשָּׁה מִשְׁכַּנְתָּהּ וּמִגֵּרַת בֵּיתָהּ כָּלִי כֶסֶף וְכָלִי זָהָב וְשִׁמְלֹת וְשִׂמְתֶם עַל בְּנֵיכֶם וְעַל בָּנוֹתֵיכֶם וְנִצַּלְתֶם אֶת מִצְרַיִם:

A woman will borrow from her neighbor and from the one who sojourns in her house, silver articles and gold articles and clothes and you shall place them upon you sons and upon your daughters and you shall empty-out Egypt.

¹¹ There are a number of versions regarding the particular merits that Israel had which served them well when Hashem had to 'decide' if they were worthy of redemption. Here we present one of those versions.

This Midrash, and similar ones, tell us that although all could be lost, we have a say in the matter. We can merit salvation. We can take the initiative and heal ourselves and make ourselves worthy and therefore Hashem will not have to do extreme acts to make sure that we do not commit national suicide.

The phrase **איתערותא דלתתא** is most applicable here. It means 'an arousal from the bottom'.

We are the 'bottom' and Hashem is the top. When, because of our lack of initiative we 'force' Him to act, that is **איתערותא דלמעלה**, an arousal from above. When we are deserving that arousal because we are good, then it showers us with goodness.

When we are deserving that arousal because we are bad, then we are showered with Divine protection which to us appears to be punitive and painful even though it is ultimately for our benefit.

We can lessen those perceived punishments and perhaps eliminate them totally if the arousal towards favor emanates from us.

Of course, that arousal comes about from the performance of Mitzvos and the level that is necessary to be successful depends on Divine judgment; He knows what to expect from us.

But it should be clear that every act that we do, and in the case of our rapidly assimilating ancestors even acts that are not inherently Mitzvos per se, but preserve the uniqueness and separateness of Am Yisroel, arouse the heavens and bring redemption.

It would seem to follow that if there would not have been a deterioration in the behavior of our ancestors, then the slavery and affliction of Egypt would not have been necessary.

History *can* repeat itself but it does not have to do so.

We can change history. We can influence the flow of history. We can have an impact.

The introduction that the Torah gives us to Sefer Sh'mos does just that. It presents us with the picture of Israel compared to the stars and shows us the alternative of Israel compared to the dust of the earth¹².

Ramban teaches that Sefer Sh'mos is *Sefer HaGeula* –the Book of Redemption.

Sefer Sh'mos *was* the Book of Redemption 3300 years ago.

Sefer Sh'mos can inspire us to write our own Book of Redemption in our lifetime.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Pollock

¹² We read in Parshas Vayetze (Perek 28/Posuk 24):

וְהָיָה זְרַעְךָ כְּעֹפֶר הָאָרֶץ וּפְרִצְתָּ יָמָה וְקִדְמָה וְצָפְנָה וְנִגְבָּה וְנִבְרָכְוּ בְּךָ כָּל מִשְׁפְּחוֹת הָאָדָמָה וּבְזַרְעֶךָ:

Your seed will be like the dirt of the earth and you will spread out to the west, to the east, and to the north and to the south and all the families of the land will be blessed through you and through your seed.

This verse is certainly a blessing. But unlike similar verses that say that Israel will be like the stars of the heavens and like the sand of the sea, this blessing implies that first we will be made like the dust, implying punishment, and then will we be fit to be the source of blessings.

See B'reishis Perek 22/17 and Perek 26/Posuk 4.