

Parashat Shemot 5784, 2024:

To Shed Light Upon the Darkness

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ה' יעזור וירחם על אחינו, כל בני ישראל בארץ ישראל ובכל חלקי הארץ

Our *parasha* begins with the famous words: “And these are the names of *b’nai Yisrael* who came to Egypt, with Ya’akov, each man and his household came.” (*Sefer Shemot* 1:1, all Tanach and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) In his *Commentary on the Torah*, Rashi (1040-1105) offers this interpretation of our *pasuk* based on *Midrash Shemot Rabbah*, 1:3:

Although [Hashem] counted them in their lifetime by their names [*Sefer Bereishit* 46:8-27], He counted them again after their death, to let us know how precious they are (*l’hodiyah chibatan*), because they were likened to the stars, which He takes out [from beyond the horizon] and brings in by number and by name, as it is said: “Who takes out their host by number; all of them He calls by name.” (*Sefer Yeshayahu* 40:26).

The expression, “*l’hodiyah chibatan*,” is not found in the midrash; as such, it is Rashi’s original contribution to understanding our verse. The Sefat Emet (Rav Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter, 1847-1905) expands on Rashi’s *chidush* in the following manner:

“*L’hodiyah* is a special message regarding our unique purpose in this world, namely, that we are symbolically like the stars. Just like the role of the stars is to shed light within the darkness of the night, so, too, it is our task and mission to shed light upon the darkness of the world.” (*Itturei Torah, Sefer Shemot*, page 8, translation my own)

The Sefat Emet’s analysis is reminiscent of three *pasukim* in *Sefer Yeshayahu* that depict our unique role as Hashem’s *or lagoyim* (light unto the nations):

I am Hashem; I called you with righteousness and I will strengthen your hand; and I formed you, and I made you for a people’s covenant, for a light to nations. (42:6)

And He [Hashem] said...I will make you a light of nations, so that My salvation shall be until the end of the earth.” (49:6)

And nations shall go by your light and kings by the brilliance of your shine. (60:3)

At first glance, one might think that Yeshayahu is the originator of the concept *or lagoyim*. HaRav Herschel Schachter *shlita* explains that this is not the case; rather, its roots are found in *Sefer Devarim* 28:10:

The *Navi* Yishayahu says that we are an *Or LaGoyim*, “A light unto the nations” (Yishayahu 49:6). But our role as a “light unto the nations” was not discovered by Yishayahu, for all the teachings brought forth by the prophets must be rooted in the Torah. The original source for our people’s role as “light unto the nations” comes from the verse, “Then all the peoples of the earth will see that Hashem’s name is called upon you.” (This and the following quote, <https://mizrachi.org/hamizrachi/our-light-onto-the-nations/>)

The phrase, “*or lagoyim*,” is often used, but little understood. Fortunately, Rav Schachter addresses this problem: “What does it mean to be a ‘light unto the nations?’ When all the nations of the world will see that we have succeeded in preserving our *tzelem Elokim* [image of the Almighty], they will learn from our people how to live with *yirat shamayim*—with fear of Heaven.”

With Hashem’s help, and our dedication to all that is right and good, may the nations of the world soon recognize that His holy name is upon us, as we shed light upon the darkness, and bring all humankind close to Him. *V’chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom

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*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)