



Yeshivat Ma'alot
Parashat Lech Lecha
Rav Yehoshua Weitzman shlit"a

ישיבת מעלות
 פרשת לך לך
 רב יהושע ויצמן שליט"א

How to Build a Nation

In this week's parasha, we read about the Brit Bein Habtarim that Hashem made with Avraham Avinu¹. One of the things that Hashem told Avraham was that his children would be enslaved for four hundred years, and that at the end of these four hundred years, they would be redeemed, and take with them riches from Egypt. Why is it necessary to mention that Bnei Yisrael would leave Egypt with great wealth; was that the main focus of their redemption? This question is strengthened when Moshe encounters the burning bush². There, Hashem tells Moshe that he will lead Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, and that when they leave, Bnei Yisrael will take silver, gold, and dresses from the Egyptians. And finally, during Makat Bechorot, Hashem tells Moshe to tell Bnei Yisrael to take silver and gold from the Egyptians³. Why is it so important that Bnei Yisrael leave with such great wealth? After being enslaved for four hundred years, isn't it enough for them to have freedom?

Harav Kook zt"l writes in Orot Yisrael⁴, that originally, Am Yisrael was supposed to be a nation like all the other nations, with an additional Godly holiness which was supposed to differentiate them. In reality, the other nations of the world fell to lower and lower levels, so much so that Am Yisrael could not be created with the same base as these other nations. The mundane aspects of the other nations could only damage the holiness of Am Yisrael. As a result, Am Yisrael needed to go down to Egypt, and from the depths of Egypt they were formed into a nation. The only way that the Jewish nation could be formed was by beginning from a clean slate.

How can one tell if Am Yisrael was truly formed anew, or if the influences of the other nations were still found within them? This can be tested by seeing how Am Yisrael was able to absorb external things, both physical and spiritual. If they were still under the influence of other nations, then these external things would destroy them. Yet if they had formed into a new and vibrant nation, then these external things would only be uplifted by Am Yisrael. For example, when a seed is planted in the ground, it is not destroyed by the elements around it, rather it uses these very elements for its own benefit, and it ultimately grows to be a strong tree. So too, Am Yisrael took from the surrounding elements, and used them to rise higher and become greater.

¹ Bereshit 15: 13-14

² Shemot 3: 21-22

³ Shemot 11: 2

⁴ Orot Yisrael 5, 8 (p. 155)

The same is true of the wealth that Bnei Yisrael took as they left Egypt. They did not, God forbid, have desires for money and riches. Rather, their taking the wealth was a sign that they were able to control these external influences, and use them to be uplifted.

In the Brit Bein Habtarim, Hashem told Avraham that he is going to be the father of a nation like no other. This nation must be built differently from all other nations, and therefore they must undergo a formation process in Egypt. And finally, as a proof that they are actually made up of special elements, they will take the wealth and riches of Egypt and uplift them.

Just as this is true on a national level, so too is it true with regard to each and every individual. When a person is at the stages of building himself and his personality, external influences such as wealth and beauty can be a stumbling block for him. Yet once a person senses that he has developed his personality in a strong and serious way, he can use external influences to uplift himself and those around him.