

ואלה שמות בני ישראל הבאים מצרימה coming to Egypt, present tense. We find the almost identical verse in פרשת ויגש when the Torah narrates their journey to Egypt from Canaan. The use of the present tense in פרשת ויגש is readily understood, as the Torah was narrating the story as it unfolded, that these were the children of Jacob who accompanied their father to Egypt. However, the events in פרשת שמות occurred after they had been there for some time. In fact, a few verses later the Torah says that Joseph and his brothers and their entire generation had passed on. It also says that each son of Israel arrived (past tense) with the members of his house, so clearly the Torah in פרשת שמות is not talking about the period of their arrival in Egypt. Why didn't the Torah use the past tense in the opening verse, to say that these were the children of Israel אשר באו, that arrived in Egypt with their father years before?

The Midrash (שמות רבה 1:4) comments on the words הבאים מצרימה that even though they had already been there for some time, it still felt to them as if it was their first day in Egypt. Even though the Jews had already been in Egypt a considerable time, the Egyptian people still viewed them as if they had just "gotten off the boat". They were always viewed with suspicion, a nation of outsiders, or other-siders (from the term עבריים) who never integrated into Egyptian society. As Pharaoh said to his people: הנה עם בני ישראל רב ועצום ממנו, "Behold the nation of the children of Israel is greater and mightier than we are". Even though they have lived among us for many years, they maintain their status as בני ישראל and do not consider themselves Egyptian.

The indictment that the Jews are considered new arrivals even after dwelling many years in a foreign land is consistent throughout Jewish History and the various exiles we have endured. During the middle ages, Jews lived in the cities of their countries of residence and were heavily involved in commerce and trade. Yet they remained separate from the rest of society. In contradistinction, the Slavs instantly assimilated into German society upon their arrival. Had the Jew surrendered his identity through assimilation hundreds of years earlier, there would have been no Holocaust. Likewise, if the Jew had been part of Egyptian society, Pharaoh never would have decreed that the Jewish People are greater and mightier than the Egyptian people nor would he have had a need to enslave them. For if they were assimilated there would have been no way to distinguish them as a distinct people from the rest of Egyptian society.

Indeed, this is the root of Anti-Semitism throughout the ages. Often we are cast as strangers with a mysterious and suspicious tie to a distant homeland. The Jew is always viewed as עברי, someone coming from the other side. The Torah calls the

Jewish women נשים עבריות who are different than their Egyptian counterparts. It is this consistent status of הבאים that prevents us from assimilating with the surrounding society, despite the pressures on us to conform.

Chazal tell us that the Jews were redeemed from Egypt in recognition of their adherence to four precepts. They did not change their names, their language, their dress and continued practice of circumcision. The Midrash puts it beautifully when it says Reuven and Shimon descended to Egypt [and the same] Reuven and Shimon returned from Egypt [unaffected by Egyptian society]. This is the meaning of הבאים. After so many years of living in Egypt, they still maintained themselves as a separate people, בני ישראל. Even though the Jew lives in society and participates in education, commerce, science and other areas, he remains distinct from it. This was Pharaoh's indictment of the Jewish Nation thousands of years ago. The Jew constantly reasserts his identity every time he studies Torah and follows the commandments. He proclaims to the rest of the world that we are still here, unchanged.

The Rav ZT"l said that during the Holocaust period he thought that American Jewry lost the spirit of הבאים. 500 rabbis organized a rally in Washington before Yom Kippur in an attempt to plead for help in saving their European brethren being exterminated at the hands of the Nazis ימ"ש and their willing assistants in other countries ימ"ש. President Roosevelt refused to grant them an audience. Vice President Wallace finally agreed to meet with a delegation of 5 rabbis. Jewish media of the day mocked their efforts. There was a fear of rocking the boat, of standing up in protest for Jews as Jews. The American Jew displayed indifference towards his brethren in Europe who were condemned to the gas chambers and crematoria of Treblinka and Auschwitz. They lost the characteristic of הבאים.

The Rav noted that in the late 60s and 70s there was a discernible difference in the American Jew who was prepared to stand up for Jewry and Eretz Yisrael. American Jews did not exhibit the same trepidation in dealing with the non-Jewish political world that the East European Jews of the past generation displayed. Though they had not won the battle against assimilation, they rediscovered a sense of הבאים.

Unfortunately, it would appear that the newly discovered courage has ebbed again in more recent times, as many Jews have capitulated to, and blindly support, the onslaught of attacks against the legitimacy of the State of Israel. The BDS movement counts among its major supporters Jewish organizations that have been

duped by ignorance or peer pressure to conform to policies that openly advocate for the destruction of the State of Israel and the potential murder of millions of Jews. These groups and individuals clearly view the characteristic of **הבאים** as a curse that shackles them to a people they do not understand and a destiny they reject, as in their opinion, it prevents them from participating fully in society. They foolishly believe that if only there was no State of Israel or no need to express support for it, they would be accepted openly by the society they live in. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth.

Gd has a relationship with all of creation, as nothing can exist without Him. All mankind enjoys this relationship with Gd. The Jewish Nation demanded more than this common relationship, and Gd established a special covenant between the patriarchs and extended it to the Jewish People that binds us directly and uniquely to Him. As participants in the common covenant with humanity and creation, the Jew shares interests and needs with the rest of the world. We seek to improve the human condition through medical research, we participate in commerce and we strive to appreciate Gd's wonders through scientific research. However the Jew has a second, unique covenant with Gd. When society attempts to pry us away from that direct covenant, we resist with all our might and no force can compel us to comply. Using this resistance as a pretext, many malign the Jew as being a separatist and not interested in contributing to the welfare of society or dealing with its problems. This is the same canard used by Haman about the Jews: they are a separate nation whose customs differ from all others and they refuse to participate in activities that benefit the general society. Of course, nothing can be further from the truth. At the same time, the Jew will not surrender his identity and retains the spirit of **הבאים**, as our unique identity will endure forever. **הבאים** means that, In transcendental and metaphysical terms, we are ready to participate with our host society if it is friendly to us, but we will resist a society that attempts to compel us conform.

This summary is copyright 2018 by Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to distribute this summary for individual use, with this notice, is granted. Distribution through electronic or printed media without the author's permission is prohibited.